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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1998

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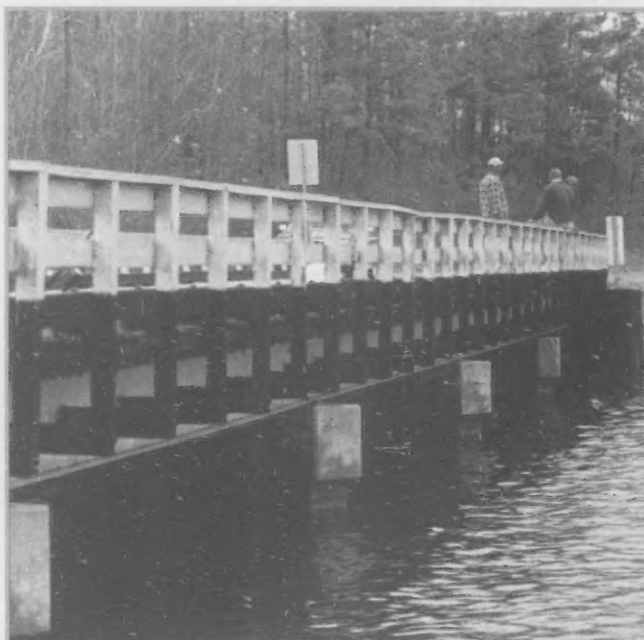
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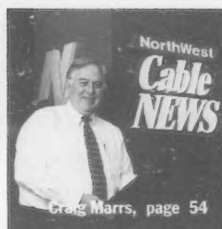


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C

# **A Talk with Lewinsky's Lawyers**

by Joan Konner

**L**ook who is not talking! Monica Lewinsky's lawyers, that's who — the Washington pros who replaced William Ginsburg, the medical malpractice lawyer from Los Angeles who talked too much in the *World According to the Press*.

Jacob Stein and Plato Cacheris, who have many prominent legal notches in their Washington belts, have spoken publicly only twice to the U.S. press since they entered the case: first, to declare they had been retained as legal counsel to Lewinsky; and second, to announce that an immunity deal had been reached with the Office of the Independent Counsel. It couldn't be, could it, that reporters and talk show producers haven't asked them to comment? In fact, it isn't. There's something else behind their silence — their view of the press.

I spent an on-the-record afternoon with Jacob Stein during which there were also four phone calls from reporters and a drop-in appearance by Plato Cacheris. Stein had represented the only defendant not convicted in the Watergate investigation, Kenneth Parkinson, and he served as independent counsel in the investigation into the financial affairs of attorney general Edwin Meese during the Reagan administration. Cacheris, among other notable cases, represented Fawn Hall during the Iran-Contra scandal and CIA spy Aldrich Ames; he was credited with saving Ames from the death penalty.

Stein writes essays and reviews for *The American Scholar* magazine. He quotes Schopenhauer on sex and epistemology. He reads the classics that line his windowless office along with law books, a few of which he has writ-



Plato Cacheris (left) and Jacob Stein

ten. He gives the impression of being more at home in the life of the mind than in the machinations of Washington or the impressive legal cases with which he has been involved.

I accepted the condition that Stein would not talk about Monica Lewinsky or independent counsel Kenneth Starr during our meeting. He was more than willing to speak about the press.

Talking to the press is a no-win situation, Stein said. He believes that the press is in the business of praise and blame. "They build up a reputation, which is news, but it is more news when they tear it down." He regarded the "incredible press" that the Stein and Cacheris team received when they took over the Lewinsky case as "part of a larger process to take Ginsburg down." Stein observed philosophically that the public is interested in the misfortune of others, and that, therefore, misfortune is a basic element of press coverage.

I asked him if it was part of the immunity deal that he and his partner would not talk to the press. He

acknowledged that "that was on the table" because "Ginsburg had talked to the press too much" and the independent counsel's office was "getting tired of that."

Said Stein: "We told them we were not going to talk to the press."

I asked whether it was part of the immunity deal that Lewinsky did not talk to the press. Stein answered: "I'm not sure of that. I don't recall." Incredulous, naturally, I repeated the question. He repeated the Clintonesque evasion. But he offered the unreported morsel that the immunity deal not only covered Lewinsky and her mother, it also covered her father.

Stein said he saw news stories that were untrue — for example, reports that her lawyers had been told that Lewinsky was going to be indicted. "We were never told she was going to be indicted."

Stein criticized the talk shows, saying cynically that there are now about "eight minutes of substance to about five minutes of commercials . . . TV has discovered that there are an infinite number of lawyers who will disagree with each other for periods long enough to interrupt the commercials. It has become of great economic value to bring these people on."

He thinks the economic motive is what drives the press and, in this case, underlies an excess of coverage. Asked whether the talk shows help inform the public about the legal system, he responded: "I think the public has enough information about the legal system to last it for five hundred years."

Stein believes that the news media today actually damage the country. "The reporters are being carried along by competition, the desire to attract



attention . . . The news media take a subject that has expired, and keep it alive so that it begins to build on itself."

Stein observed that the press in the Kenneth Starr investigation found itself in the odd position of knowing where the leaks came from and speculating about where they came from in order to conceal the sources. Stein said he can usually tell where a leak comes from.

Both Stein and Cacheris were surprised by the amount of detail contained in the Starr report. Neither believes the news media performed a public service by publishing the full text of the report or, Stein felt, by broadcasting the Clinton taped testimony. Stein said, "It may be a good idea for people who have a political motive. And yes, there is some economic value."

Cacheris also discerns an economic motive at work in press coverage. He said that when you see that newspapers that ran the Starr report sold out in hours, "somebody has got to be looking at the figures and saying 'This is making money.'"

Asked if he thinks the news media have damaged the presidency, Stein responded, "Yes, I do"; and if the press can actually run the president out of office, he responded "Yes, I do."

Stein said the Lewinsky story had evolved to this crisis point because of press coverage, but "the president has met the press more than halfway," meaning that Bill Clinton's behavior has been responsible for the excessive coverage. Cacheris believes that the press, collectively, favors impeachment hearings. He concludes this from the way the press is "ridiculing the defense" that Clinton is putting forward.

Stein charged that *The New York Times* editorial page was "strident" and "almost rabid about trying to destroy" Clinton. Cacheris agreed, saying he believed the *Times* was feeling morally outraged at the president's conduct.

Cacheris was more explicit about the team's "informal agreement" not to make themselves accessible to the press. He said: "I wouldn't want to do a show with one person because the rest of them would eat you alive. I don't want to be on *Geraldo* in any circumstances. If I want to be on *Larry King* that means I have to go on CNN, ABC, CBS. And that means I spend the rest of my life on shows." He added that he would not go on any TV show because

he thinks it would do violence to client confidences.

I asked Stein and Cacheris if they believed their client, Monica Lewinsky.

"We never had to make a judgment," Stein said.

"It doesn't matter," Cacheris added. "You know why it doesn't matter? The independent counsel believed her . . . All we had to do was deliver a credible witness to them. They accepted her as credible. And we have no comment on it."

Asked if they had given Monica Lewinsky any advice on how to deal with the press, Stein replied: "Every

day." Cacheris added: "Not to talk with them."

I couldn't help noticing that during my visit Stein took phone calls from *The Hill*, *New York* magazine, *National Journal*, and Knight-Ridder Newspapers. When Aaron Epstein of Knight-Ridder called, Stein said to him: "I've been bombarded with calls from the press. She [Konner] must think I'm a leak. I want you to tell her otherwise. Somebody sitting here would think that all I do here is give out information." ♦

For an extended version of this interview, see CJR's Web site at [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).



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**X** Boy, what a headache! And all because some of you may be using our name in a generic manner. Which could cause it to lose its trademark status the way the name "aspirin" did years ago. So when you do use our name, please use it as an adjective to identify our products and services, e.g., Xerox copiers. Never as a verb: "to Xerox" in place of "to copy," or as a noun: "Xeroxes" in place of "copies." Thank you. Now, could you excuse us, we've got to lie down for a few minutes.



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# Why Our Union Won't Be Giving To United Way This Year.

“Last year, members of Pipefitters Local 602 helped Habitat for Humanity construct five, two-story homes in southeast Washington, DC for low-income families. Apprentice Paul Grant said ‘you always wonder how to give back to the community, and this is a great way to do it.’ His comment typifies the attitude of UA members all across North America.

There is a full-page feature on the inside front cover of every issue of our UA Journal entitled ‘The Heart of the UA’ that chronicles the acts of charity of individual locals around the country. We believe in giving!

That is why it disappoints me to pull our union out of United Way, because since its inception organized labor and its millions of members have been staunch supporters.

The genius of United Way has been its ability to bring every facet of the nation together for united giving—including business and labor.

United Way has never been political, and neither union nor corporate officials who participate in United Way ever endeavored to misuse the organization for political reasons.

That ended this past spring. When United Way’s policy staff issued a stinging rebuke of Prop. 226 in California, (the so-called “Paycheck Protection Act”) anti-union employers supporting the Act were furious. They demanded that United Way repudiate the staff report. And the United Way leadership caved to their demand.

What United Way rescinded was a staff warning that Prop. 226 was so poorly drafted it would “cause a variety of adverse consequences for nonprofits.”

The Chronicle of Philanthropy, the nation’s leading publication on charitable giving, agreed, informing readers that Prop. 226 “is written so broadly that it applies not only to union dues, but also to charitable contributions.”

This was a message anti-union employers didn’t want to hear, so they brought pressure on United Way to deny what every responsible person knew to be true: that Prop. 226 was hazardous to the health of every charity.

United Way took the corporate side on a political issue critical to working families all across America. California voters wisely defeated Prop. 226—no thanks to United Way.

Our union will in no way reduce its charitable giving—we’ll simply give elsewhere, and the new endeavor we are proud to support is the Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis.



Martin J. Maddaloni  
General President

We will resume support but not until the United Way leaders restore their pledge to the slogan “Labor Cares—Labor Shares.” ”



# letters

## UNDER NO INFLUENCE

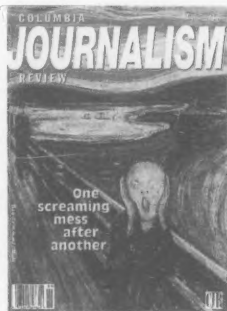
Nicholas Stein's "Banana Peel" (CJR, September/October) provided an excellent summary of the Chiquita affair. But as the foreign editor and an editorial writer at *The Cincinnati Enquirer* from 1967 to 1976, and as business editor from 1977 to 1979, I raise my eyebrows at the assertion that "even after Carl [Lindner] sold [the *Enquirer*] in 1975, the paper's editorial stance continued to mirror his business and personal interests." The *Enquirer's* conservative politics needed no such influencing. As business editor, at a time when Lindner's American Financial Corporation was under scrutiny by the Securities and Exchange Commission and the subject of a somewhat successful class-action lawsuit over his decision to return the company to private status, no one ever told me how to cover the story or even suggested that it be handled in any way that would favor Lindner interests. Carl Lindner's opposition to discussion of his business affairs in the news media was as strong then as it is now. That made the story harder to report, but we did a decent job — better than anyone else in Cincinnati at the time.

SCOTT AIKEN  
Scott Aiken Public Relations  
Cincinnati, Ohio

## AUTODIDACTICISM?

Your article on Keith Bradsher, "Awards and Anguish for a Driven Reporter" (CJR, September/October), is just as silly as his practice of showing up at press conferences with tape measures to determine the bumper heights of light trucks.

Bumper heights, alone, tell you nothing about a vehicle's aggressivity — the potential damage it can do to another vehicle and its occupants in a crash. A bumper can be low, yet conceal a structure that can be deadly in a crash, depending on



the size discrepancy of the vehicles colliding.

Similarly, your story misses the point. The issue, as I told the writer, is whether the available evidence shows that sport-utility models are causing increased mayhem on the nation's roads. The answer, so far, is "No." Numbers from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, and preliminary research by

the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, indicate as much.

Also, it is a flat-out fallacy that automakers are redesigning light trucks — in response to *The New York Times's* campaign. I challenge anyone at CJR or the *Times* to come up with tangible proof — timetables, development and design schedules, etc. — supporting that argument. What you will find is that the changes going into new light trucks had been in the works as long as three or four years ago, well before the media's frenzy over light-truck safety.

WARREN BROWN  
Automotive writer  
*The Washington Post*  
Washington, D.C.

## EXAGGERATED NEWS

In "The Death of Radio Reporting" (CJR, September/October), Larry Grossman claims that among Washington radio stations, only WTOP and public station WAMU provide "serious news." The fact is, WMAL's news department has provided not only serious news, but Washington's highest-rated radio news for decades.

Grossman refers to last spring's Chesapeake AP news competition, but neglects to mention that WMAL won six awards in that competition, including best newscast, best enterprise reporting, best spot news reporting, and outstanding news operation. Grossman didn't mention that WMAL has a staff of reporters covering news in Washington daily — or that the AP has named WMAL the best radio

## COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

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news operation in Washington for thirteen of the last sixteen years.

JOHN BUTLER  
Operations manager, WMAL  
Washington, D.C.

There is one small but significant word missing in a quote from me in the article on radio reporting by my friend and former boss, Larry Grossman. I am quoted as saying, "WTOP is usually the only radio station with a reporter on the scene because it's the only commercial radio station in town that still employs reporters." The word "practically" should have been included before the word "only." It is true that WTOP reporters usually find they are the only radio reporters on the scene when news breaks. However, two other commercial radio stations (WMAL, WHUR) do indeed employ radio reporters.

JIM FARLEY  
Program director, WTOP  
Washington, D.C.

## WHO LOST POL POT?

Your July/August story suggesting that Pol Pot may have been killed by the Khmer Rouge because of a *New York Times* report about U.S. plans to capture him — or, more accurately, about U.S. discussions on plans to possibly consider attempting an effort to think about capturing him — fails to apply skepticism in the appropriate places.

Pol Pot died at 73, more than twenty years after the worst of the Khmer Rouge's crimes, and well into Bill Clinton's second term as president; suddenly it was a burning priority of the Clinton administration to bring the man to justice? Note that the Clinton administration took no action when Pol Pot was actually in custody, held under house arrest by the Khmer Rouge, last year. When his location was known, and there was no question that he would be going anywhere for a while, journalist Nate Thayer found Pol Pot — and the U.S. government didn't.

Also, if the Khmer Rouge was really so concerned about the possibility that Pol Pot could testify in a war crimes trial about the crimes of other members, would they really have held him under house arrest in the first place? Would they ever have allowed a reporter to have access to him? These aren't people who are at all shy about violence; if they were genuinely

frightened by the possibility that Pol Pot would share what he knew with the rest of the world, one suspects he would have been dead a long, long time ago.

As for the assertion that the *Times* story "doubtless reach(ed) the mountainous hinterland where Pol Pot and the remaining Khmer Rouge fighters were hiding," I would love to see CJR's evidence that this is so. Think they picked it up at the newsstand with their morning cappuccino, or did they plug their laptop into an ISDN line and read it online?

The U.S., and the rest of the world, left Pol Pot to walk free for two-plus decades after he led some truly staggering acts of inhumanity. The complaint — we would have done something if that darn news media hadn't screwed it all up — is an effort to shift the blame. Shameful.

CHRIS BRAY  
Free-lance writer  
Santa Monica, California

## DISPELLING MYTHS

Jay Mathews blackens his good name as an ex-China reporter with "The Myth of Tiananmen" (CJR, September/October). He gets his facts wrong and hence his conclusion, while traducing his colleagues who risked their lives to get the story. At least he admits he wasn't in the square. I recall his bewilderment on the morning of June 4, 1989, when he asked me to tell him what I had seen.



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Mathews's piece must be judged on one phrase: "as far as can be determined from the available evidence, no one died that night in Tiananmen Square."

His own evidence appears to rest wholly on the account by George Black and Robin Munro, in their excellent *Black Hands of Beijing*. But all they say, and all they could see, was that the students jammed around the Martyr's Memorial early on the morning of June 4 were not killed. I believe them. But like all of us, the authors' view was limited by the size of the square and the tumult.

Late on the night of June 3, I was in front of the Forbidden City where the huge Mao portrait hangs over the Tiananmen gate. While some of the People's Armed Police were beating me up, others were shooting demonstrators whom they had clubbed to the ground. Minutes earlier the army had fired directly into the same crowd and the man next to me fell over with a red stain on his white tee-shirt. I cannot swear that all the victims I saw shot died. I hope not.

Nor was I alone. Mathews attempts to discredit "massacre" stories by quoting a story in *The New York Times* by Nicholas D. Kristof disputing exaggerated reports of deaths. But in his and Sheryl WuDunn's *China Wakes*, Kristof describes seeing troops in the square firing into a crowd in which some people "fell to the ground, wounded or dead." He saw more firing during the next two hours, "and more people fell to the ground." He witnessed rickshaw drivers "bravely facing the soldiers, to pick up the dead and wounded." To be sure, Kristof states "there was no huge massacre of students within Tiananmen Square itself." Most of the killing, he says, went on elsewhere. I agree. So does Mathews. But killing in the square? Absolutely.

Then there is the account by the Toronto *Globe and Mail's* veteran China-reporter Jan Wong, in her *Red China Blues*. This is the best eyewitness reporting I have seen of what happened in the square. Wong and Cathy Sampson of *The Times* (London) lay on a balcony of the Peking Hotel, with their notebooks and watches, looking across into the square. Wong's description is long and detailed. Three examples will serve: on June 4 at 2:14 A.M., she saw "a murderous volley" into a dense crowd. At 2:23 tanks "fired their machine guns at the crowds." At 3:12 "there was a tremen-

dous round of gunfire . . . The soldiers strafed ambulances and shot medical workers trying to rescue the wounded . . . Between 3:15 and 3:23 I counted eighteen pedicabs pass me carrying dead and wounded."

I know Wong to be a reliable witness because later that morning, starting at 9:46, she on a balcony, I on the street below, watched soldiers outside the Peking Hotel fire into a large unarmed crowd a two-minute trot from Tiananmen. Wong counted three volleys and twenty bodies. Altogether that morning she recorded "eight long murderous volleys . . . Dozens died before my eyes."

JONATHAN MIRSKY  
London, England

*Mirsky, a former China correspondent for the London Observer, received the 1989 British Press award, "International Reporter of the Year," for his Tiananmen reporting.*

*Mathews replies: When an astute observer and generous colleague like Jonathan Mirsky misses my point, I know I have not made it well enough. Let me try again. All the accounts he cites are by splendid reporters. Nothing in my piece was intended to deny or demean their work in any way. As I said, people were murdered on streets near the square. I remember in particular Jonathan's account when he first told it to me later that day and I share his rage at what happened.*

*My concern was not the reporting of Jonathan or other genuine eyewitnesses. The myth I attacked was the widespread image of Chinese troops mowing down student demonstrators at their encampment in the square. That false impression has tainted many accounts of Tiananmen by journalists who were not there. It has so far resisted attempts to correct it in newspapers like The New York Times and The Washington Post. Jonathan is not defending that myth, and I am sorry if I gave him the impression that I thought the great bulk of the reporting that night was not first-rate. He also does not defend the misimpression that most of the murdered citizens were students.*

*American commentators have latched onto that notion because it fits our preconception of what a democratic uprising should be in a country like China. As far as anyone can tell, most of the victims that night were workers like the rickshaw drivers Jonathan mentions. As I tried to say, it is less important to know where the killings took place than who died and why.*

## NATIONAL PRESS FOUNDATION

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Four-day programs offer all-expense-paid fellowships to competitively selected journalists and are held in Washington unless otherwise noted. Dates remain to be set for some programs. Briefings run from 9 - noon, require advance registration and are marked with a \*. Latest details are always on our website, [www.natpres.org](http://www.natpres.org). Leave a message for information at 202-662-7356.

#### November

Briefings: \*MarketWatch - Changes in the Health Care System (NYC) In collaboration with and funded by the Kaiser Family Foundation  
\*Economic Security: Retirement, Health Insurance & Other Social Benefits

A new series in collaboration with the Employees Benefits Research Institute

#### December

Briefings: \*Emerging Issues in Reproductive Health (NYC)  
In collaboration with and funded by the Kaiser Family Foundation

#### January

10-13 --Lobbyists, Lawyers & Legislators: Competing Agendas for 1999

Application deadline: December 1, 1998

Briefings: \*Economic Security: Retirement, Health Insurance & Other Social Benefits  
\*MarketWatch - Changes in the Health Care System (NYC)

#### February

NPF's 16th Annual Awards Dinner, February 24, Washington

#### March

14-17 --Electronic Commerce (Nashville, TN)  
In collaboration with Vanderbilt University; funded by a grant from VISA USA

Application deadline: February 1, 1999

Briefings: \*Economic Security: Retirement, Health Insurance & Other Social Benefits  
\*Emerging Issues in Reproductive Health (NYC)

#### April

18-21 --Telecommunications Revolution; 4 days; funded by MCI Communications Corp.

#### May

Fundamentals of Life Insurance & Financial Planning (Bryn Mawr, Pa.)

4-days; in collaboration with the American College; Funded by the LIFE Foundation

Briefings: \*Economic Security: Retirement, Health Insurance & Other Social Benefits  
\*MarketWatch - Changes in the Health Care System (NYC)

#### June

Fundamentals of Auto Insurance; 4 days; funded by a grant from State Farm Insurance Companies

#### July

Briefings: \*Economic Security: Retirement, Health Insurance & Other Social Benefits

# CJRupfront

MAGAZINES

## HOLLYWOOD TWO-STEP

*The Risky Dance of Editors and Agents*



When *Texas Monthly* disagreed with HBO's proposed adaptation of its article "Silicon City," the network fictionalized the story. The result was *Breast Men* (starring *Friends*'s David Schwimmer, right).

In the slush piles of Hollywood, alongside the unread manuscripts, screenplays, and movie treatments, lie the newest issues of *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, and *Texas Monthly*, among other publications. Directors, producers, and TV and film executives have become some of the most avid readers of narrative journalism, and increasingly they are expressing their admiration in the universal language — money.

Perhaps this development was precipitated by the public's fascination with "true" stories rather than fictional ones. Maybe it was rooted in movie studios' hunger, in a competitive environment, for original narratives peopled with compelling characters. But whatever the cause, the move-

ment of ideas from magazines — and to a lesser extent, newspapers — to the movies, once a languid trickle, is now a flowing stream. And though the benefits of luxuriating in Hollywood's waters continue to lure journalists and media organizations alike, there are some dangerous currents.

Journalism's Hollywood connection goes back a few years. Before 1996, when Disney hired *Premiere* magazine editor Susan Lyne as a magazine scout and instructed her to buy articles for future film purposes, a movie studio or production company occasionally would purchase an option on a magazine article. The option, which generally lasted for a year, seldom exceeded five or six thousand dollars.

But with Lyne and others mining the landscape, the money began to get serious. In 1997, Columbia-Tri-Star agreed to pay Mike Sager \$1.6 million for his *GQ* article about Janet Cooke, the disgraced *Washington Post* reporter (and Sager's former girlfriend), who won and then lost a Pulitzer Prize for her phony story. Then, this past June, Miramax Films elevated synergy to the institutional level when it hired Tina Brown to create a magazine, not yet named, with the express purpose of generating ideas for its movie division.

Now, a new wrinkle: Some publications are themselves hiring Hollywood talent agencies like the William Morris Agency, International Creative Management (ICM), and Creative Arts Agency (CAA), to represent them in the hunt for the wealth, exposure, and "buzz" that accrue when their stories are sold. Others hope that an agent will enable them to assert greater control over the "after-life" of their own material.

*Texas Monthly* has enjoyed the advantages of agency representation for years — at least fifteen, according to editor Gregory Curtis. "We want to have people who know how to sell these properties," he says. "I'm not sure we'd have any movie deals without them." In the last three years alone, seven *Texas Monthly* articles have been optioned, and two have made it to television.

William Morris has represented *Texas Monthly* since 1992, and Curtis feels that his magazine has profited on many levels from its ongoing relationship with agencies. "To have representation gave us the kind of visibility we wouldn't have otherwise," he says. "And our writers get an extra paycheck." So does the magazine: staff writers keep 75 percent of revenues from movie deals; free-lancers keep 50 percent. This leaves anything from \$1,500 to

\$250,000 or more for the magazine. *Texas Monthly's* executive vice president of operations, Marsha Cook, prefers to focus on an ancillary benefit of all this visibility — brand extension: the ability to spin off additional products from a recognizable name.

Then there is brand protection. *Reader's Digest* signed in August with CAA. Yet for editor Christopher Willcox, the motive for his deal with the talent agency was mainly to protect his magazine's name. "We don't want a movie to carry the *Reader's Digest* brand unless it is carried out with the same attention to taste, detail, and fact as we do," he says. A savvy agent, he adds, can insure a degree of quality control through negotiation.

Fears that projects won't meet expectations are sometimes justified. When HBO was unable to reach an agreement with *Texas Monthly* for Mimi Swartz's 1995 article about the inventors of breast implant surgery, it simply fictionalized the story and made the film without the magazine or its agents at William Morris. The resulting film, with *Friends* star David Schwimmer, was "not something we would want to associate with us," says Lisa Lawrence, the magazine's public relations manager. "The nugget came from us and then it spun off into another whole ball of wax."

Motivated by these and other concerns, *The New York Times* felt compelled to articulate a Hollywood policy to its own writers after a flood of interest in *Times* articles from studios and production companies. The paper announced in a memo to the staff dated July 21 that the company "is exploring the possibility of engaging our own representative or agent, who would represent the *Times's* interests — financial, ethical, and otherwise — in any discussions involving a writer or a writer's agent, and a filmmaker."

The author of the memo, Bill Schmidt, head of news administration, envisions "an anti-agent" rather than an agent, one who would protect the paper's reputation instead of seeking deals. "Our concerns are largely ethical, and deal with avoiding any conflicts of interest," he says.

Schmidt worries about the danger of complications when *Times* reporters take on consultative roles with studios or production companies. For example, a studio might request that a reporter turn over notes and documents from a story, he says: "If a prosecuting attorney approached one of our reporters with such a request, it

would cause an uproar. We would be especially craven if we did it for money."

Schmidt also fears the public's perception of deals between the newspaper and a film studio. "How do you know whether or not someone with an interest in a movie project might try to plant the story in the *Times*, and then use the story as a hook to get a production deal? It might lead to speculation about our objectivity."

David Fishman, a consultant who represented Condé Nast during discussions earlier this year with ICM, says it was precisely this sort of fear that convinced his client not to sign exclusively with any one agency. "We talked about opening up a pipeline for Condé Nast magazines, about fostering relationships with people in Hollywood so the right people were reading our magazines," he says. "But if you have a relationship with just ICM, you create difficulties for magazines with celebrity content like *GQ* and *Vanity Fair*. If we were an ICM shop, it would get ticklish when we wanted to feature a celebrity represented by another agency. And we didn't want to leave room for any notion of journalistic impropriety."

Though his magazine profits from selling its articles, *Texas Monthly's* Curtis insists this has no impact on editorial deci-

sions. Says he: "Everybody understands that a magazine exists for its readers."

How do the writers, who for years have traded dances with both editors and agents, feel about all this? "The money is great," says Sager. And scripts that come out of good magazine articles can mean better movies, says Marie Brenner, a writer-at-large for *Vanity Fair*. Her piece on tobacco industry whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand was bought by Disney. It is now in production as a movie, with Russell Crowe as Wigand, Al Pacino as *60 Minutes* producer Lowell Bergman, and Christopher Plummer as Mike Wallace.

But Brenner admits that the Hollywood connection could affect the content. "Are you doing an article because it might sell, or because it is journalistically sound?" she asks. "This worries me, what an editor chooses to assign." When asked to describe the juncture between journalism and Hollywood, Brenner envisions "the big story meeting in the sky. Think of it: editors, reporters, and indies pumping up the narrative, e-mailing two-sentence synopses to Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington. It makes me laugh. I may even put this idea in development."

—Nicholas Stein

Stein is *CJR's* assistant editor.

## HEAVY HITTERS

# HOW TO SELL NEWSPAPERS

First, get your local baseball hero to chase Roger Maris's home-run record. Second, make the most of it, as did the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with St. Louis Cardinal Mark McGwire. Then, print a lot of extra copies. The *Post-Dispatch* tripled its press run to 900,000 on September 9, the day after McGwire hit his sixty-second, and also sold half a million extra copies. So many fans lined up outside the paper's lobby (see photo) that managers installed a pair of portable toilets. The paper sold another 900,000 copies when McGwire finished off his season at seventy, and nearly ran out of ink. An instant book on McGwire's triumph is set for publication this fall, to be produced jointly by the *Post-Dispatch* and *The Sporting News*. Then everyone can rest, including sports columnist Bernie Miklasz. "I'm worn down physically and I'm worn down mentally," he said in mid-September. "I've had six or seven columns a week and only one true day off in two months. At some point you just run out of adjectives." In Chicago, where Cub Sammy Sosa was challenging McGwire for much of the season, the *Tribune* increased sales by 32 percent right after he hit his sixty-second.

Fine is an investigative producer for ABC News.



—Josh Fine

JAMES A. FINNEY/AN WIDEWORLD PHOTOS





## WEB SITE SPOTLIGHT

# FINALLY, A PEEK AT PROFITS

## Some News Sites Find the Formula

Internet journalism may not require black ink, but it certainly produces a lot of the red variety. Fortunately, this may be starting to change. A small but diverse range of journalistic sites are claiming to have crossed over into profitability — or are near it anyway.

Of course, "profits" can appear with the help of creative accounting, by shifting costs like reporters' salaries or office overhead to a parent company. And not everybody online is even seeking immediate profit, at least not yet. For example, at TheStreet.com, the financial news site, editor-in-chief Dave Kansas says the company is plowing revenues back in to build up the site. On the other hand, Thomson Newspaper Corporation expects all twenty of its online operations to be profitable, and vice president Jonathan Sheer says that, with rare exceptions, they are. Thomson anticipates a \$3 million annualized-rate profit, based on July's performance from its online ventures in 1998.

From the chain's flagship paper, Toronto's *Globe and Mail*, to *The Advertiser*, in Lafayette, Louisiana, all Thomson dailies put their classified ads online for an additional charge of 3 to 4 percent, and beyond that, a quarter of the papers put news online.

Managers at several sites say they are turning the corner. Their content varies as widely as the kind of audiences they seek and the business models each of them follows. But they all publish at least some original content online. None is simply a repackaged version of a parent newspaper, magazine, or broadcast. Here are some of them:

### CNN INTERACTIVE (cnn.com)

Mark Bernstein, vice president and general manager, reports that this heavily

visited advertising-supported site has shown periods of profitability in the past, and he expects it to be in the black for 1998 as well. As at all seven CNN television networks, profitability is defined as revenues exceeding costs, says Scott Woelfel, vice president and

"in-depth" sections, with original and repurposed reporting, last year, and will likely produce at least as many in 1998, with titles like *Russia in Crisis* and *Target: Microsoft*. These sections are produced by an in-depth editorial staff of seven.

The site also employs an "interactive producer" who is in charge of developing interactive components to complement other material — interactive clickable maps, for example, and a "Quick Vote" feature for online polls. CNN Interactive is available in Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish, and draws 25 percent of its traffic from outside the U.S. Among advertising clients are Web Street Securities, Salomon Smith Barney, and Universal Pictures.

### NATIONAL JOURNAL'S CLOAKROOM (cloakroom.com)

This is one of *National Journal's* creations, a members-only site that uses a blend of multimedia and interactive tools to cover the U.S. political scene. Founded in 1997, the site is already making a profit, says publisher Dan Solomon, through a combination of advertising and subscriptions. Cloakroom is available to subscribers of the \$1,047-per-year *National Journal*.

This niche site is aimed at political insiders, including consultants and journalists, and its traffic is relatively low compared with CNN Interactive — some 600,000 page views per

month. But its readers appeal to advertisers like AETNA US Healthcare, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the National Cable Television Association.

Cloakroom's "Ad Spotlight" illustrates its content strategy: it is an online guide to the world of political and issue advertising, combining reporting and analysis from all branches of the National Journal Group, along with some original content. For example, viewers can see recent political ads and accompanying news and analysis of them. Original content includes "The Buzz," a daily collection of commentary, analysis, and political scuttlebutt, and "Back Bench," quips, tips, and clips from campaigns around the country.

The image shows two overlapping screenshots of web pages. The top screenshot is from CNN Interactive, displaying a news alert about a shooting in Kentucky and a section titled 'Judiciary Committee members stake out positions on impeachment'. The bottom screenshot is from National Journal's Cloakroom, featuring a 'DIRECT LINKS' section with links to 'The Hotline', 'House Race Hotline', 'Greenwire', 'Daily Energy Briefing', 'CongressD', and 'AmericanH'. It also includes a section titled 'Why Gore's Not In Trouble' with a portrait of Al Gore, and another titled 'The Dream Job' about a talk with Jon Macks.

editor in chief for CNN Interactive.

CNN Interactive fields an editorial staff of 110. What draws the site's traffic — 403 million page views in August; 34 million on September 11 alone, the day the Starr report was released — is its volume of original content: news and analysis from CNN and elsewhere in the Time Warner empire. Woelfel estimates that at least half the site's content includes new reporting added to content adapted from TV. Some 10 percent of the content is completely original.

For the Cold War series currently running on CNN, CNN Interactive produced online originals on the space race, spies, and "the bomb." All together the site created more than forty-five



## THE ELECTRIC TIMES UNION (timesunion.com)

The digital offspring of the Hearst-owned *Times Union* newspaper in Albany, New York, this site gets revenue primarily from a combination of classified and display advertising. It was the first newspaper-based site to publish its region's Multiple Listing Service — the exclusive property database used by real estate agents in an

says Reid Johnson, c.e.o. of the Internet Broadcasting Service (IBS), which designed and manages the site. An online offering of WCCO-TV and Radio (the CBS affiliate and AM station in the twin cities) and MSC (Midwest Sports Channel), the site focuses on news, weather, sports, and business.

Revenue comes from three sources: ad banners, partnerships (that pay for links), and e-commerce. For example, the site has a marketplace section where it has created a number of "stores" for local vendors, and the site gets a percentage of sales. Content is culled from a variety

*Money*, and \$49 a year for others. The site generates an equal amount of revenue from advertising. It fields more than fifty journalists, and they produce extensive original content.

This late but welcome sighting of profits in the online universe is tied to several developments. These include the continuing growth of the Internet as a mass audience medium (advertisers have noticed), the increasing availability of low-cost and fast Internet connections (enabling more multimedia and interactivity), and the creation of online news products that adapt more fully to the unique characteristics and capabilities of the online environment.

Most news sites still lose. And no single business model seems to offer the magic key to online success. But it's clear that the long-run financial viability of online news sites seems linked to the development of multiple revenue streams, including both banner and classified advertising revenues, and in some cases (especially for niche publications) subscriptions and electronic commerce. And that some sites have found a formula that works.

John V. Pavlik

John V. Pavlik is executive director of The Center for New Media at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.

area, says Dave White, advertising director for both the newspaper and the site. Now the site includes all classified ads from its print counterpart, and advertisers are charged 10 percent over the old newspaper-only price.

The Electric Times Union offers a blend of re-packaged content from the newspaper and original online reporting. A recent special report — Hudson River Chronicles — illustrates the approach. A three-member news team took an eighteen-day trip down the 306-mile historic river in September, reporting on a variety of waterway-connected issues. To the text published in the paper, the site added an expanded interactive photo gallery, audio interviews with various experts, and a reader forum.

Soon, The Electric Times Union will offer online Yellow pages. It already brings in some modest revenue from selling access to its online archives. The site is also investing heavily, says White, and plans to hire more editorial and business staff.

## CHANNEL 4000 (wcco.com)

This local TV site in Minneapolis-St. Paul showed its first profit in September 1997, making it the first of its kind to do so,

In July, Channel 4000 won the National Press Club's first-ever Online Journalism Award for best news site. Judges cited Channel 4000's use of text, video, and hyperlinks in keeping flood victims informed during the 1997 spring floods in North Dakota and Minnesota. The site set its all-time traffic record with 4.2 million page views in September.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL INTERACTIVE EDITION (wsj.com)

Wsj.com is not profitable just yet, but this closely watched site expects to be in the black some time in 1999. Tom Baker, vice president and general manager, says that subscriptions supply roughly half of the site's revenue. Wall Street Journal Interactive has more than 250,000 paying customers — at \$29 a year for subscribers to the print version of the *Journal*, or to *Barron's* or *Smart-*

## LANGUAGE CORNER:

### Cardinal Rules

A Little League team's players, the article said, "picked up their third World Series victory in as many days." There's an extremely common error there. As many as what? As many as third? No, obviously. "Third" is an ordinal number, denoting the position of something in a sequence. "As many as" needs to refer to a cardinal number, one that denotes a quantity, not a position. If the sentence had said "picked up three" games in as many days, that would have been fine. (But for all that, "as many as" smacks a little of elegant variation. What's wrong with "their third World Series victory in three days"?)

—Evan Jenkins

For more on the language, see CJR's Web site at [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).

# AND BABY MAKES A 33-SHARE

## *When Is a Personal Story Too Personal?*

The Thursday night newscast on WCAU in Philadelphia began normally enough: a murder, the sports, the weather. Then, toward the end of the broadcast, anchor Renee Chenault turned to the cameras and launched into a four-minute report about . . . herself. "I'm having a baby!" Chenault exulted, and proceeded to fill in all the blanks. She was forty. She was alone. And she'd become pregnant through artificial insemination.

Cut to a shot of the clinic, where the deed was done. Cut to a doctor, draped in

reporter Ike Seamans), heart attack (the unfortunate Seamans again), bone cancer (Norfolk TV anchor Terry Zahn), addiction (Chicago TV correspondent Robin Robinson on her brother's life and death as a heroin addict), and marriage (*The Arizona Republic's* David Leibowitz proposed in a June column).

Many of these "this is my life, film at 11" stories are effective. Few people can structure a narrative and yank on heartstrings like folks who tell stories for a living. Most reporters who draw from their own lives say they're doing it as a service.

They were set in the context of an NBC affiliate that has been unashamed of employing a bit of show biz in its drive to challenge WPVI, the more traditional ABC affiliate.

After a WCAU staffer told *Daily News* gossip columnist Stu Bykofsky that Chenault had been artificially inseminated, he ran an April 28 item headlined, PREGNANT? CHENAULT WON'T SAY. Chenault was not happy about the report, and was quoted in the piece telling Bykofsky, "I wouldn't discuss the time of day with you, let alone any aspect of my personal life, and I find you very offensive for even making this call."

But as soon as that story ran, the station began figuring out how to make Chenault's personal life public — and fast. WCAU began promoting the story eight days after the Bykofsky piece — even before Chenault had the results of her amniocentesis. The piece ran the next evening, on a Thursday, which happens to be WCAU's biggest broadcast night. It was also the beginning of the May sweeps.

Critics raised their collective eyebrows. "It was no accident that it ran on Thursday night," says *Philadelphia Inquirer* television columnist Gail Shister. "It was a sweeps stunt." Frank N. Magid, c.e.o. of Frank Magid Associates, the big-time TV news consultants, says the pregnancy-as-news was a ratings ploy, pure and simple. "Television news is a competitive enterprise," he explains.

The reaction seems to have brought about some change. When Chenault did two short follow-up pieces on her pregnancy in September, they aired without fanfare, without promotions, and without music, and while they featured more footage of Chenault with her parents, they focused more on the broader issue of artificial insemination as a choice for single women.

Chenault herself is still refusing to talk to the press about her increasingly apparent condition. Her baby girl (the gender has been announced on the air) is due in November — just in time for sweeps.

— Jennifer Weiner  
*Weiner covers television for The Philadelphia Inquirer.*



Chenault and her co-anchor, Larry Mendte, celebrate her good news.

surgical scrubs. Piano and flute plays dreamily in the background. Cut to Chenault, talking it over with her parents.

In those four minutes Chenault turned herself into the talk-radio topic du jour, the subject of public debates on the morality of starting a family without marriage or a man.

Among journalists, Chenault sparked a different debate, one that was also about boundaries and propriety: When do up-close-and-personal stories cross the line from well-intended and informative to cynical circulation or ratings boosters?

Personal reportage, of course, is nothing new. In the last year alone, TV and print reporters covered their own breast cancers (*USA Today's* Cathy Hainer and the *New York Daily News's* Jami Bernard), skin cancer (Miami TV

Norfolk's Terry Zahn says he'd long been associated with the American Cancer Society, as a fundraiser and guest speaker, and "it would seem hypocritical to say, 'Now I've got it, but I don't want to talk about it.' But the more important reason was my reporter's instinct. I could give perspective. I could tell my story for all of the other people going through this."

Cathy Hainer, who wrote about her breast cancer for *USA Today*, had similar motives. "I think some people might have felt that what I did was a little tasteless, or lacking in discretion, or thought, 'My God! This woman's bald on the front page!' But breast cancer is an epidemic that will affect a million of my readers."

While it might have been meant to educate, the Chenault piece came with certain complications and contradictions.

## STRIKES

# DETROIT: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

**B**efore the ink could dry on the National Labor Relations Board's ruling in the long-running Detroit Newspapers labor dispute, appeals were filed that may take months to resolve. "The courts have busy dockets," says William Schaub, NLRB regional director in Detroit. "A year would not surprise me." After that, a decision handed down by the U.S. Court of Appeals could even go to the U.S. Supreme Court, a step that can last years.

Nonetheless, the August 27 decision brought the three-year-old dispute a giant step closer to its finale. The five-member NLRB unanimously found the *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press* guilty of unfair labor practices, ranging from illegal implementation of merit pay proposals prior to the strike to a failure to offer reinstatement to workers after it ended.

And while corporations may permanently replace workers who strike over economic issues, that is not the case when it comes to a strike over labor practices. So the NLRB ordered the papers to return remaining locked-out employees to their jobs — with back pay dating to February 14, 1997, when the unions officially ended their strike. That will happen only when appeals are exhausted, or if the two sides reach an agreement outside the courts.

Predictably, the unions and the newspapers disagree about just how many former employees might eventually be affected, and how much back pay is therefore involved. Since the strike ended in 1997, the newspapers have rehired just 708 former strikers, and they have vowed that the approximately 900 replacement workers hired during the strike will not lose their jobs. The unions' goal is to return all locked-out workers who want to go back. Shawn Ellis, spokesman for the Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions, which represents the six striking unions, says that of the approximately 2,500 employees who walked out in 1995, fully 2,000 made an unconditional offer to return in 1997. While some of those people have since moved away, changed careers, or otherwise lost interest in going back, Ellis estimates that about 1,200 locked-out workers remain eligible.

Detroit Newspapers, which runs the two papers via a joint operating agreement, has a far shorter list of former employees it considers eligible to return to work — 620, according to spokesperson Susie Ellwood. "I know the numbers aren't the same," says Ellwood. "and I know ours are right." Part of the dispute centers on the Detroit Newspapers

unwillingness to include employees it discharged for "strike misconduct." Most of those people are appealing their terminations to the NLRB.

Despite the bitterness of the long dispute, there is some hope that the two sides can bridge their differences outside the legal system — in negotiations. In August, the Federal Mediation Office requested a return to the bargaining table. A confidentiality agreement prevents either side from discussing the ensuing talks, but Schaub, for one, hopes that they might bring this long dispute to an end.

"It's time to start examining how many of [these workers] really want to come back," he says. "Compliance with the rulings might not be as onerous as previously thought."

Circulation at Gannett's *News* and Knight-Ridder's *Free Press* has dropped significantly since the strike began. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, their combined daily circulation was 865,374 at the start of the strike in July 1995. It was 613,509 as of the most recent audit, in March. —Courtney McGrath  
*McGrath is an intern at CJR.*



GEORGE WALDMAN/DETROIT SUNDAY JOURNAL

## SCENE

# NEAR THE ALAMO, TALKING TV

**I**n the audience were 4,000 radio-and-TV-news types. On stage, in comfy club chairs, were Tom Johnson, c.e.o. of CNN, Andrew Heyward, president of CBS News, and Roger Ailes, president of Fox News Channel — all worrying about aspects of their industry. At the annual convention of the Radio-Television News Directors Association in San Antonio, hard

by the Alamo, conferees acknowledged that all is not rosy in television news.

Johnson worried about "the junk food component": too many stories that are unchecked and wrong. In his most abject apology yet for the CNN Tailwind fiasco, he said: "It will live with me forever. It never should have made air. We let our viewers and standards down. I'd give any-

thing in the world if I could take it back."

Heyward lamented that "Lewinskyitis" was driving other news — education, juvenile crime — off the air as TV folk, "scared of boring people," broadcast sensational, crowd-pleasing stories to grab shards of an increasingly fragmented audience. Ever since the old-line TV oligopoly of ABC, CBS, and NBC was shat-

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tered, he said, broadcast news organizations no longer have audiences or revenues healthy enough to support "sustained worldwide newsgathering."

Fox News's Ailes described the way newspeople are scrambling to cover the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal as something out of the Keystone Cops. In so fiercely competitive an environment, he said, the lust to be first defeats sound journalistic sense. "I've told my journalists that you won't get fired if you're not first."

**T**he grass-roots TV and radio journalists spent four days attending workshops and symposia and chatting up TV news celebrities like Jane Pauley, Wolf Blitzer, and Carole Simpson. A hot topic: how to make the complex, expensive transition from analog to digital transmission of local news programs — a difficult metastasis that will require all of them to begin broadcasting in wide-screen, high definition TV in the next few years.

"This is a fundamental change in our business," said Charles Sherman, a vice president of the National Association of Broadcasters. "It means lots of *tsuris*, lots of pain. But in that pain lies the future of television." The new system, with all its additional channel space, he said, will be rich with new possibilities for electronic journalism: all-news local broadcast channels; staggered broadcasts of a station's regular news programs; "zoning" of news to specific regions; special channels for stocks, sports, and weather.

Federal Communications Commission chairman William E. Kennard worried that if a handful of big media companies end up owning every TV station in every major market in America, the quality of local news coverage is bound to suffer. All the evidence is that "consolidation causes broadcast owners to cut back on serious reporting and replace it with fluff and syndicated news."

One big concern of the news directors: the effect on children of today's x-rated news, rife with reports on oral sex, semen-stained dresses, and the like. What do you tell a child, one questioner wanted to know, when kids ask what the Clinton/Lewinsky hubbub is all about? ABC News's Simpson replied with a wink:

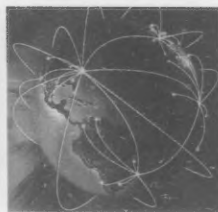
"Tell them that when a man and a woman *really, really* like each other, sometimes the man gets impeached by Congress."

—Neil Hickey

Hickey is CJR's editor at large.



# CJRworld



## BRITAIN

### THE BATTLESHIP THAT TURNED ON A DIME

#### *How the BBC Woke Up*

A little more than a decade ago, BBC News headquarters in London was shrouded in gloom. Cutbacks had devastated the corporation. Audiences were drifting towards competing terrestrial channels, with cable and satellite growth poised to plunder still more. Worse, the prime minister was on the warpath. Offended by critical stories, Margaret Thatcher set her sights on the license fee, the \$100-plus tax on every TV set owned in Britain, which now provides the BBC with more than \$3 billion a year, more than 90 percent of its budget. Without that money the British Broadcasting Corporation would sink — and with it the leading international news broadcasting operation in the world.

Cut to 1998:

- On September 18 the BBC launched its digital broadcasting service in Britain, adding channels, improving picture quality, and paving the way for an array of new media possibilities. The BBC beat the official digital launch of Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV by a week.
- On November 1, BBC Television News was scheduled to begin broadcasting in the U.S., reaching a potential audience of 36 million homes via selected PBS stations.
- The BBC's magazine group has launched more than twenty new titles in recent years, from *Gardener's World* to *Teletubbies*.
- BBC Online ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)), which



Director-General  
John Birt

started in 1997, has grown into the largest news-media Web site in the U.K. It offers more than 140,000 pages of content, of which 61,000 are devoted to news, the rest to entertainment and other BBC fare.

So the venerable Beeb has transformed itself into a modern media conglomerate, but with a difference: the BBC has initiated its new enterprises, including the frankly commercial ones, as a means to defend and expand its tradition of public service. This means enhancing news and documentary operations, not gutting them. The new enterprises are designed to attract new audiences, develop an independent financial base, and create revenue streams that

will leave the BBC prepared for the day when the license fee, its economic life-line, could cease to exist. Long regarded as a patrician institution that moved at its own stately pace, the BBC is the battleship that turned on a dime.

There is no American parallel to the BBC. Created and licensed by the British government, it is not of the government, and it has produced more critical reporting on government policies than most "independent" broadcasters in other countries. Its editorial autonomy is defended by a board of governors, whose twelve members represent a narrow slice of the country's elite — it includes four knights, a dame, and one Lord Cocks of Hartcliffe. The board has always defended news, and it can usually hold its own in its dealings with the government. As Terry Marsh, a former BBC newswoman, says, "It's almost a government-to-government relationship."

License-fee financing is another pillar of strength. Tony Blair's Labor government is kindly disposed towards the BBC, and the fee is expected to be extended when it comes up for renewal in 2001. Nonetheless, the shocks of the late 1980s convinced Director-General John Birt, 54, that drastic measures were necessary to guarantee the BBC's survival. "I don't think you can ever take [the license fee] for granted," says Richard Sambrook, head of BBC Newsgathering. "It's a glorious anomaly."

But it's an anomaly that allows the BBC to pursue strategies based on long-range planning — with news as the centerpiece of international expansion — rather than on ratings, stock price, and corporate mergers.

The British public has a strong allegiance to news, and that is reflected in the

GLOBE: VILIAM WHITEHURST/THE STOCK MARKET; BIRT: GAVIN SMITH/ISI/CAWMA



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BBC's numbers. In a country with a population of 58 million, a popular documentary can draw an audience of 10 to 11 million. Yet the BBC has not always been above dumbing down some programs to get crowd-pleasing results. The big documentary ratings have corresponded to a relatively new phenomenon called "docusoaps" — series that reveal the real-life soap operas that unfold in British institutions like shopping malls and veterinary clinics. One recent hit, *Driving School*, came under fire from critics recently for including a reenactment of a factual event. At the same time, drama series like this season's *Cops* rely on cinema vérité techniques that intentionally blur the line between fact and fiction. The distinction between "docudrama" and "docussoap" is shrinking perilously.

Yet the BBC has maintained its commitment to the loyal niche audience for more purist fare. Producers estimate that there is a core documentary audience of 800,000 for their most challenging work, and the BBC continues to present them with a startling array of pieces that win prizes, stimulate debate, and, sometimes, provoke reform. Recent subjects include the Truth Commission in South Africa, single mothers, and Britain's national health-care system.

Cable has been much slower to arrive in Britain than in the States, and it is still an open question whether it (along with satellite TV) will weaken the BBC as much as cable has weakened the big three U.S. commercial networks. The impact of U.S. imports has already been felt on the entertainment side. *Baywatch* and *The X-Files* are crowding British products off the schedules. Murdoch's satellite Sky TV has grabbed hugely popular sporting events away from the BBC. The BBC's news producers, like their U.S. counterparts, have also had to face up to dismaying demographics — an audience of over-55s, prosperous but aging, and often lukewarm to foreign themes.

Still, the BBC clings to the notion that news and documentaries don't have to be popular to be important. Bucking the trends, the Beeb has increased its investment in international coverage. BBC News has well over 2,000 journalists on staff, including more than 200 correspondents, and fifty overseas bureaus. (The BBC will be investing an additional \$25 million on foreign coverage over the next three years.) "You can't ignore what the audience wants,"

Sambrook says, "but we also have to rely on our professional judgment."

That judgment bears the weight of responsibility. The BBC holds the high ground of British news culture. There is no single "newspaper of record" in the British market. The British newsstand is lacking in newsmagazines (with the notable exception of *The Economist*) and has no equivalent of *Harper's* or *Atlantic*. To the extent that there's a "news canon" in Britain — a dinner-party-lubricating common denominator — it's the BBC.

John Birt, director-general since 1993, had to confront certain institutional weaknesses on his watch: the BBC's resistance to new technology, its economic dependence on the license fee, and its insularity. (On the domestic front, the BBC has been regarded as a bastion of the Oxbridge mafia, rooted in the economically dominant south of England. Internationally, BBC television had a history of erratic distribution ventures, gaining only modest exposure and even less revenue.)

Birt responded to the technological challenge by pushing his vision of the BBC as a twenty-first-century "information provider." The Beeb hopes to build on its assets — public confidence and mind-boggling archival materials — by, in current management parlance, "taking them across platforms," or extending the information through a variety of traditional and new media. Next year, a BBC viewer will be able to watch a TV news program, use interactive television to summon up additional background in text format, and place an order for a BBC magazine spin-off — all on the same digital screen. (The screen will be different too. This winter Britons will be able to buy a \$1,600 digital television that will offer a hyper-crystalline image and a hologram-like depth.)

Birt's vision also includes scores of new cable channels for many offshoots of BBC programming, including drama, lifestyle, and sports. But the international reach of the BBC's news operations — and the depth of its library of factual programming — make news and documentaries one of the most provocative areas to contemplate.

This digital future, in fact, is not so different from media-company plans in the works in the U.S. But it will come to the British customers first — with the BBC sizing up the U.S. as an export market.

The Beeb is developing a new inter-

national commercial market for its programs via its cable-and-satellite service, BBC World, an international twenty-four-hour news channel. It is distributed to 187 countries and 55 million homes, largely in Europe and Asia.

And on November 1, BBC World was to begin airing its daily half-hour news and analysis programs in the U.S. — via PBS — as well as *This Week*, highlights from the previous seven days.

The BBC is creating other commercial revenue streams — with pay TV channels and magazine groups. A new subsidiary, BBC Worldwide, markets the network's documentary and drama archives internationally, operates pay TV channels in Britain and abroad, and publishes books and magazines — all with the goal of generating a profit.

Worldwide's burgeoning print empire projects none of the high-mindedness of the broadcast news division. BBC magazines tend to be consumer-driven tie-ins to entertainment and life-style programming, similar to the other glossies crowd-

ing the British magazine stands. *BBC Girl Talk*, for the pre-teen set, makes no noticeable effort to edify, but it does carry promotional material for "Beany Baby" clones and junk-food "Munchy Bears." The shelter and gardening titles, which tie in to popular programs like *Antiques Roadshow*, would seem more at home in a Martha Stewart catalogue than a BBC documentary line-up.

**T**im Gardam, a BBC alumnus now running news at the new independent, Channel 5, told an Edinburgh Television Festival audience in August that he fears that "the BBC will become product-obsessed, like one of those chicken factories with all these different spin-offs."

But so far there's no reason to assume that the commercial sidelines need to damage core values. If the BBC has had one overarching attribute, it's the way the institution has buffered the news division from both internal and external assaults.

John Birt's policies have been controversial, but they were designed as

administrative streamlining, not editorial redefinition. He will step down as director-general in March 2000, when the customary maximum of two terms is up. But the changes he envisioned are well under way, and there will be no turning back. The technology of television, the nature of Britain, and the global marketplace have all changed in fundamental ways since he took over, and he has gambled heavily on his interpretation of the future. Birt's successor has yet to be named, but it is universally assumed that, like Birt, he or she will have news as both professional background and first loyalty. This will be the first step to guarantee that Britain's uniquely successful experiment in public broadcasting not only survives, but prospers in the twenty-first century.

—Anne Nelson

Anne Nelson is the director of the international division of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. She has previously contributed to news and documentary programming for PBS, the CBC, and the BBC.

## INDONESIA

# BRINGING BACK A LEGEND

## Journalistic Rebirth in Jakarta

**U**ntil recently, Indonesian writer and editor Goenawan Mohamad was devoting much of his time to poetry, literature, and quiet political organizing. His days of pressure-cooker journalism and tight weekly deadlines ended when the government in 1994 banned his highly regarded weekly magazine, *Tempo*, and left him to other pursuits.

He became a symbol of resistance to the regime and found himself at the center of a community of journalists, activists, artists, and students bound together by what often appeared to be a quixotic struggle against the seemingly unassailable leadership of President Suharto. *Tempo*, which Mohamad, 57, founded in 1971 and built into a profitable, 200,000 circulation newsweekly — Indonesia's version of *Time* — was becoming a distant memory. There was little chance that Suharto would ever allow it to publish again.

Then came Indonesia's abrupt economic collapse, widespread rioting, and

Suharto's May 21 resignation; what had been one of Southeast Asia's most prosperous nations appeared headed for chaos. Military rule seemed likely or, worse, civil disintegration under Suharto's hand-picked successor, Bacharudin Jusuf (B.J.) Habibie, a technocrat and longtime Suharto loyalist.

But for Goenawan Mohamad, a recipient of a 1998 International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists, a funny thing happened on the way to calamity. He and many other Indonesian journalists are back in the magazine business. Indonesia suddenly has one of the freest presses in Asia. *Tempo* relaunched in October, Mohamad is back as editor in chief, and most of his staff have



Mohamad



returned after a four-year diaspora. Expectations are high.

The new *Tempo* must recreate a magazine that hasn't published for more than four years, even as it remains an important symbol of the new openness. It will face an economic climate that has seen advertising revenues shrink precipitously and the cost of newsprint soar. It will also face plenty of competition from

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## F I J

Human tragedies were involved in the development of the B2 stealth bomber. They occurred in a top-secret Boeing Company hanger where carbon fibers were molded to the fuselage to help the B2 evade radar detection.

Reporters Eric Nelson and Mark Worth uncovered the facts. Factory fumes were taking a toll on Boeing employees from occupational hepatitis to body rashes like stings from sea nettles. Claire Parrot said, "There were times when I literally lost my hair—it came out in golf ball-size chunks."

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new publications eager and able to investigate the sins of the past regime and the shortcomings of the current one.

"The odds are that Indonesia will remain in a chaotic situation for some time," Mohamad told me recently in Jakarta. "Violence will be a constant threat and we will be the sick man of Asia. That frightens and saddens me. The best thing the press can contribute is to develop a culture of transparency and accountability in the government. We hope *Tempo* will become a place that will help defend and expand our freedoms."

When *Tempo* was banned, the proximate cause was a story about an internal government split over the purchase of thirty-nine former East German warships placed by Habibie, who then was research and technology minister. Suharto reportedly was furious that the magazine had dared to air a cabinet controversy. But this year, within ten days of Habibie's taking power, Information Minister Lt. Gen. Mohamad Yunus was assuring the press that the days of strict limitations were over. "He told us, you can reopen anytime," recalls Fikri Jufri, publisher of *Tempo*. "I was shocked."

Yunus has confounded skeptics in the press. A former special forces commander, he was responsible for security in disputed East Timor when five foreign TV journalists were killed there during the Indonesian invasion in 1975. He is now a born-again believer in a free press. By September he had signed some 180 new publication licenses and he is pushing for the removal of all restrictions on the press. "I want to see more publications in Indonesia," he said during an interview in

his office. "I really do believe that such a thing will provide more information and build the creativity of the people."

Still, the decision to relaunch *Tempo* was a difficult one for Mohamad. Many of the magazine's former staffers had settled in at other publications or changed careers. A relaunch would inevitably cause some dislocation, especially to editors and reporters at *D&R*, a magazine owned by the *Tempo* group. In the last year, *D&R* came into its own under editor Bambang Bujono, a *Tempo* veteran, by challenging the Suharto regime. To make way for *Tempo*, *D&R* was sold to the *Jakarta Post* newspaper group. Half of its thirty reporters are moving to *Tempo*, with the blessing of editor Bujono, who nonetheless seemed wistful as he contemplated the loss of his staff. "This is a publication that sides with the people," he said of *D&R*. "I am staying with it because I want to keep this magazine going."

With Indonesians enjoying a remarkable journalistic rebirth, the challenge for Mohamad and his staff will be to produce a magazine that reflects this difficult and exciting time in their country. It's a challenge that Mohamad is keenly aware of. Says he: "After Suharto left, there was an eagerness on the part of many journalists to resurrect *Tempo* but others said the magazine was a legend and should stay that way. This makes our task difficult. It is not easy to recreate a legend every week." —A. Lin Neumann  
A. Lin Neumann is Asia program coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists.

## CROATIA

# THE PRESS IN A NEW DEMOCRACY BATTLES A TOUGH ENEMY: LAWSUITS

A surprisingly calm atmosphere pervaded the offices of Croatia's newest newspaper a few days before one of its top editors was about to stand trial. Smoking cigarettes and chewing on pizza, young reporters typed stories for the next day's edition. Even Davor Butkovic, the editor charged with libeling Croatia's cabinet,

did not seem worried as he raced between meetings through halls that still smelled of fresh paint.

"I deeply believe that I did my job strictly professionally and that in a democratic society journalists must be allowed to report what they see," said Butkovic, whose blunt, florid face and intense manner have become familiar to





D. TADIC

Davor Butkovic

many Croats through television coverage of his trial.

The case, which was still pending as of October, is a sign of the challenges Butkovic's newspaper, *Jutarnji List* (*Morning Paper*) must overcome if it is to succeed as Croatia's first independent daily in forty years. *Jutarnji List* faces the same problems as many businesses starting up in a newly private economy as this small country — once a republic in the former Yugoslavia — emerges from war and communism.

The case against Butkovic was part of an effort by the Croatian government to crack down, through regulations and hundreds of lawsuits, on the country's few independent media outlets. Visiting Croatia on August 30, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called for "respect for a free media" in order to "keep leaders accountable."

Butkovic was charged with libel after the magazine he formerly edited, *Globus*, published an accusation last year by Kroll Associates, a U.S.-based private investigations company, that the government was corrupt and influenced by organized crime. In response, all twenty-three of Croatia's cabinet ministers filed suits seeking a total of about \$700,000 in damages. On April 20, a judge ruled that neither Butkovic nor *Globus* (owned by the same company as *Jutarnji List*) could be held responsible for the accusation. But the government appealed the case and it was handed to another court. If he loses, Butkovic faces up to eight years in prison.

Butkovic also has seven other libel suits currently filed against him by politicians who are connected to or are members of the ruling party.

In Croatia, journalists can be sued for libel for reporting facts considered insulting or harmful to a government official's reputation. To be acquitted, they must prove their intention was not to offend. The Croatian Journalists Association is trying hard to reform the penal codes. About 500 lawsuits are pending against journalists in Croatia, including about 130 criminal libel suits totaling over \$13 million in fines, reports John Fox, director of the Washington, D.C., office of the Open Society Institute. "The Croatian government is setting the pace for media repression in the region," Fox says. "It uses a relentless strategy of economic, administrative, and police measures against the media and individual journalists."

**M**ost of the media are controlled or influenced by the government. Print media in Croatia are relatively freer than electronic ones, but both are subject to pressures the state imposes with taxes and fines. The Telecommunications Council, appointed by the parliament and composed of politicians from the ruling party (HDZ), decides which media to license. A Croatian journalists' group recently proposed making the majority of the council members who are not connected to the ruling party, but parliament rejected it.

"If you have a good relationship with the ruling party, then you get the broadcast license," says Jagoda Vukusic, deputy editor-in-chief of the daily *Novi List* and president of the Croatian Journalists Association. She estimates that nearly all of the fifteen TV stations in Croatia are owned by people sympathetic to the ruling party.

Croatian journalists have accused President Franjo Tudjman of acting as editor-in-chief of all media, electronic and print. The journalists say that the HDZ has refused to discuss ways of making HRT, the state-controlled television station, more independent. Secretary of State Albright said that she told Tudjman that "HRT cannot operate this way." She added that "having an open and free media, especially a television that functions freely, is one of the benchmarks of what has to happen."

*Feral Tribune*, an influential, satirical weekly, often angers the Tudjman gov-

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## WORLD

ernment with critical articles and has suffered heavy court fines and legal bills as a result. Vesna Alaburic, a media lawyer, says that *Feral Tribune* could probably win its case in the European Court of Human Rights, but such a process could take up to six years and bankrupt the newspaper in the process.

Butkovic says he's hopeful that *Jutarnji List* can resist future economic pressures from libel suits that smaller newspapers cannot. That's because his paper is owned by the well-funded media conglomerate Europa Press, which also publishes the Croatian editions of *Playboy*, *Cosmopolitan*, and other magazines. Many journalists working in the smaller, independent media outlets are having difficulty making a living, and some newspapers are near bankruptcy.

"I tell my reporters to go out and do their best, most aggressive reporting and don't worry about who it might offend," Butkovic told me in Zagreb. "Other newspapers are worried about making enemies with the political parties."

The Croatian government is "not at all open to the press," says Butkovic. "It's impossible for reporters to get an interview with the president." The media never broadcast or publish criticism of Tudjman, adds Vukusic. "And he has done plenty of things wrong that we know about."

Croatians are well aware of the media's problems in their country. A recent poll sponsored by the Croatian Journalists Association found that only a minority of respondents agreed that the media are in a better state than before the 1991 war between republics of the former Yugoslavia. Seventy percent agree with the statement that, "There is no democracy without full media freedom." Another study found that HRT is the most important source of information for 74 percent of the population. Four of the six newspapers in Croatia are state-controlled and these inform 8 percent of the people while weekly newspapers are the main source of information for about 2 percent.

*Jutarnji List*'s publisher, Marjan Jurleka, says that the success of the paper depends not only on editorial freedom but also on how well Croatia's economy recovers from the effects of the 1991 war. The paper's costs are high because it must import newsprint from Finland. At about 75 cents per copy, the paper is costly. The average yearly per capita income is \$3,992.

To compete, *Jutarnji List* has been promoted with a vigorous ad campaign that included billboards and radio jingles with the slogan — "365 Puta Bolji!" — 365 Times Better. The paper hit a circulation of about 110,000 in its first week of publication in April, selling out quickly on newsstands. Now, with an ongoing circulation of about 160,000, the paper is trying to distinguish itself from its competition by focusing on global news and offering a Web site. "I'm not overoptimistic," Jurleka says. "If Croatia is to be open, it must have a free press. But a free, private press also needs to make money."

—Sascha Brodsky

Sascha Brodsky is currently studying for a dual degree at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and the School of International and Public Affairs.

## NIGERIA

# FREE-PRESS HOPES FADE

For Nigeria's besieged press, the time between the sudden death of reviled strongman General Sani Abacha on June 8 and Chief Moshood Abiola's fatal heart attack on July 7 proved to be the cruelest month ever. Abiola, owner of the nation's largest privately owned media company, the Concord Group, had been imprisoned by Abacha in 1994. He became a symbol of Nigerian journalists' bitter dismay in their battle against the military regime, which responded with a calculated — and almost successful — campaign to destroy the independent press. With Abiola's death in detention, the euphoria the press enjoyed upon Abacha's demise dissipated as quickly as it had erupted.

In this maelstrom, General Abdul-salam Abubakar, a career soldier who was virtually unknown outside military circles, emerged as Nigeria's leader. Overnight, the country's journalists dug in to do battle with yet another general, and sounded the alarm on the nation's editorial pages.

The watchdog private press exposed Abubakar's close relationship to former Nigerian dictator General Ibrahim Babangida; he has remained a potent



Youths in Lagos, Nigeria, cheer the passing last year of dictator General Sani Abacha

force within the military since he ceded power to Abacha in a 1993 coup d'état. Babangida has now assumed a public role in the current regime's desperate attempt to placate citizens' demands for an immediate transition to democratic rule.

The 139-year-old Nigerian press is Africa's most prolific and vociferous, setting the standards for media practitioners throughout the continent. In the 1990s, the media met their match in the Abacha regime, which ratcheted up abusive treatment of the press, promoting tactics such as indefinite detentions without charge, torture by police and state security agents, disappearances, office bombings, and bans and seizures of publications.

**T**he impact of Nigeria's decimation of the private press has had echoes in the unprecedented, rapid deterioration of press freedoms elsewhere in West Africa. Gambian ruler Yahya Jammeh's importation and enactment of restrictive Nigerian decrees, many aimed at silencing the press, has rendered that country's legal system ineffective. In Ghana, before Abacha's death, exiled Nigerian journalists were being threatened with deportation to Nigeria for commentary critical of the Abacha regime in Ghanaian media. Nigerian security agents faced no impediments in February 1997, when they kidnapped *Razor* magazine publisher Moshood Fayemiwo in broad daylight in neighboring Benin and transported him across the border to Nigeria. There he was detained, chained to a pipe, and tortured until his release in September 1998.

In August, the Committee to Protect Journalists held a conference in Ghana that gave leading Nigerian journalists their

first opportunity in years to meet without the threat of security raids or detention. As they discussed political events in their country with colleagues from Ghana, Zambia, and Argentina, many participants claimed that Abubakar's recent release of detained journalists was not a sign of lasting change, or even a "honeymoon." The resounding consensus was that the Nigerian journalists have a long way to go before they can freely practice their profession.

The regime has at its disposal a host of statutes for use against journalists who criticize its officials. Examples: The Detention of Persons Decree No. 2, allowing indefinite incarceration of citizens; the Offensive Publications Decree No. 35 of 1993, which permits the government to seize any publication deemed likely to "disturb the peace and public order of Nigeria"; the Treason and Treasonable Offenses Decree No. 29 of 1993. The last mentioned was used in 1995 to convict journalists Kunle Ajibade, Chris Anyanwu, George M'bah, and Ben Charles Obi as "accessories after the fact to treason" for reporting on an alleged coup plot. Fortunately, all four have been released by Abubakar.

Abubakar's tacit endorsement of the controversial 1995 draft constitution is widely regarded by the media as an indication that the regime won't reverse its repression of the press. The draft calls for the creation of a Mass Media Commission that would have sweeping powers to restrict journalists' ability to do their jobs, and grants officials the authority to silence the press in the name of national security.—**Kakuna Kerina**  
*Kakuna Kerina is the Africa program coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists.*

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# darts & laurels

◆ **DART** to *The Wall Street Journal* and staff writer Daniel Costello, latest nominees for membership in the Curious Coincidences Club. Costello's May 29 compilation of food festivals around the country included several substantial ingredients — among others, lively descriptions of the Georgia Peach, the Gilroy Garlic, and the Kutztown, Pennsylvania, German festivals — that were strikingly similar to the mouth-watering listings in *Food Festivals: Eating Your Way from Coast to Coast*, a book by Barbara Carlson published by Visible Ink Press in 1997. With the unfair absence of any acknowledgment of Carlson — whom Costello had sought out and interviewed — or her book — which she had express-mailed to Costello — sticking in its craw, Visible Ink wrote to Joanne Lipman, editor of the *Weekend Journal*, asking for some sort of notice informing readers about the book. The reply came from Stuart D. Karle, associate general counsel for Dow Jones. "Mr. Costello never 'lift(ed)' text from Ms. Carlson's book," the lawyer wrote, ignoring the numerous peas-in-a-pod likenesses. "Mr. Costello had intended to refer readers to Ms. Carlson's book. Unfortunately, he learned that the book would be of little value to *Journal* readers in the summer of 1998 as it was published in the Spring of 1997. Given these facts, no correction will be published."

◆ **LAUREL** to *The Kansas City Star* and special projects reporter Joe Stephens, for proving that justice is indeed blind — to its own ethical conflicts. In his two-part series "On Their Honor: Judges and Their Assets," Stephens presented incontrovertible evidence that, in violation of U.S. law and the Judicial Code of Conduct, federal district judges have been presiding over scores of lawsuits against companies in which they have a financial interest. Based on an exhaustive review of the hard-to-get stock portfolios of lifetime-appointed federal judges in four sample states, matched against cases that had passed through their courtrooms, Stephens's unprecedented series (April 5,6) also explained why such abuses went unrevealed. The rare litigant who made it through the red-tape maze of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts in Washington, D.C., to obtain a judge's financial disclosure reports risked infuriating the very person who would determine the outcome of the case. Even as Stephens was wrapping

up his story, reform began. Judges sold stocks, revised their disclosure reports, offered to conduct new trials. One withdrew from a \$9 million lawsuit over which he had presided for the last eight years. And more than two dozen judges agreed to open their assets lists to anyone who wished to see them, no questions asked.

◆ **DART** to WMAQ-TV, NBC's owned and operated station in Chicago, for yet another slide down the slippery slope. The station recently entered into a cloudy arrangement with the Midwest telephone company, Ameritech, proud owner of a recently installed Doppler Radar system leased by WMAQ — and, not incidentally, WMAQ's largest advertiser. A July 10 memo from the station's advertising department instructed all meteorologists and weather reporters to "mention Ameritech in the on-air weather presentation at such times as NBC 5 shall deem appropriate." The memo helped with an example: "Now let's go to the NBC 5 live Doppler Radar on the Ameritech Tower in Naperville." The directive further required the station's weathercasters to mention each mention to the sales department, which in turn would keep Ameritech informed. Station manager Larry Wert now says that while weathercasters are no longer obligated to mention Ameritech, "from time to time, they do." (As was noted by *Sun-Times* media critic Robert Feder, who disclosed the hidden-commercial deal in his July 17 column, WMAQ had suspended news anchor Carol Marin in 1995 for refusing to read plugs for sponsors.)

◆ **DART** to Bruce DeSilva, enterprise editor of The Associated Press, for an incredible lapse in judgment. Hired by the Allentown, Pennsylvania, *Morning Call* to coach its reporters and editors in improving their skills, DeSilva showed up with a mystery guest in tow. While staying mostly in the background, she did at times participate. In one session, for example, DeSilva asked her to read from her work, which he held up as a model. In another session, when discussion turned to the question of cleaning up quotes, DeSilva solicited her opinion. At that, at least one reporter left in protest — for by then, people were beginning to figure out that the uninvited guest was Patricia Smith, the overimagina-

tive columnist who had recently left *The Boston Globe* in disgrace. "I understand now that I should not have let Patricia accompany me, and certainly should not have asked her a question," DeSilva wrote in a July 24 letter of apology to the paper's managing editor. At the same time, he went on, he was dismayed by the staff's reactions to her presence. "Patricia did a terribly stupid and unethical thing, for which she not only was fired but has received the professional equivalent of the death penalty. That, it seems to me, is not only just but sufficient."

◆ **DART** to *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, for playing politics with the news. The paper's May 14 city edition carried a page-one box slugged "Election '98." Below its headline, WHERE DO THEY STAND?, the following notice appeared: "Candidates hoping to represent San Diego County in Congress and the state Legislature tell their positions, speaking out on the environment, crime, the economy, and other issues in a Voter's Guide for the June 2 primary elections. — Pages B-8 and 9." But readers who turned to the paper's inside spread were guided only to the views of Republicans and Libertarians; not a single position of a single Democrat was anywhere to be found.

◆ **DART** to Yvonne Samuel, a reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who is also a certified diversity facilitator as well as an ordained minister; and Myra Dillingham, a representative of LDC&Associates of Kansas City, Missouri, which runs diversity programs nationwide, for doing more harm than good. In an appalling perversion of such programs' goals, Samuel and Dillingham chose to end a mandatory diversity-awareness workshop at the paper in July not only with a joined-hands prayer — but with a prayer to Jesus Christ. Earlier in the session, when participants had been asked to share a personal experience of feeling "different," one Jewish reporter had recalled a moment of Christian prayer in public school some forty years before. After the session, that reporter wrote a memo to management describing the "sour taste" of the message of the workshop prayer: "the Christians are in charge and anyone else is different." Editors later apologized to offended members of the staff, and have since contracted for future workshops with another diversity consultant. Oddly, however, as reported in the *St. Louis Journalism Review* and *The New York Times*, management says it made the switch for reasons of cost, rather than for a transgression that went so far beyond the pale.

◆ **DART** to *USA Today*, for incorrigible waywardness. Once again, "The Nation's Newspaper" sold its front page — logo, layout, typeface, features, graphics, and all — to an advertiser. In what is only the most recent such trick by *USA Today* (see Darts & Laurels, July/August 1997), this special promotional edition wrapped the happy news about a pharmaceutical company, Glaxo Wellcome, around its June 30 European edition, then dropped the whole adulterated package at the bedroom doors of the thousands of attendees at the 12th World AIDS Conference in Geneva.

◆ **LAUREL** to *FamilyCircle*, for a service piece of a different kind. Amid the predictable fare of one-pot dinners, wallpaper wonders, and beauty tips, the October 6 issue presented a powerful, nine-page report on the miracle of bone marrow transplants. The report drew on the experiences of two young families who had survived, through the goodness of far-away strangers, the nightmare of having a loved one — a thirty-seven-year-old mother, a five-year-old son — suffer from an otherwise fatal blood disease. The report drew on the experiences of those good strangers as well. Sidebars, graphics, and a Q&A explained the discomfiting procedure and how and why it works, while a helpful bind-in card to Congress made it easy to request more funding for research and a registry of donors. Finally, in a strong "Call to Action," *FamilyCircle* offered to provide free blood screening — the first step to donating bone marrow — for the first 5,000 volunteer donors to call its special hotline. Urged the magazine: 'Just Do It.' By mid-October, some 3,000 readers did.

◆ **DART** to the Bloomington, Illinois, *Pantagraph*, for panting after fame and fortune for its advertisers and its staff. In full-page color ads on Saturday, June 13 and Sunday, June 14, the paper lured readers to a "Guess-the-Number-of-Papers-in-the-Pantagraph-Truck" contest at the Eastland Mall. The big draw (besides the promotional prize of "a \$250 Eastland Mall Shopping Spree"): the chance to "meet *Pantagraph* celebrities and staff." Smiling from the ads were those ten "celebs," accompanied by details of the scheduled weekend hours of their appearances at the mall. Identified by name but not by job description, they turned out to be *The Pantagraph's* publisher, news editor, business writer, operations manager, reporters, photographer, and p.r. guy.

*This column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.*



"A Knight Fellowship gives you a chance to focus your mind — deeply — even while you take in a hundred new delightful experiences. So it appeals to the moral philosopher as well as the curious kid in every journalist. What I liked best of all, though, was being part of a

small group of like-minded journalists, sampling freedom and trying to make sense of this bewildering world we find ourselves in."

— **Miranda Ewell, San Jose Mercury News Fellow '95**



"Is the Knight Fellowship worth the risk of stepping off your career track for a year? The trade-off is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study and reflect without real-world pressures, and join a fraternity of top-notch journalists. It certainly boosted my enthusiasm for my

job, and my sense of what I can accomplish in the future. Bottom line: It's a career-enhancer."

— **Richard Gonzales, National Public Radio Fellow '95**



"Every journalist should attempt, at least once, to take time off from the newsroom; to step back and assess where you are going and where you want to be, and how a journalism fellowship can lead you to that goal. Stanford University is the perfect environment for those

looking to the changes ahead in our industry in the next century. The year I spent on my Knight Fellowship made me a born-again journalist. The time I was able to spend reading, researching and studying reconnected me to the passion I once had for covering the news as a young reporter."

— **Sheila Stainback, Fox News Fellow '83**



"The year at Stanford was a wonderful experience in mind expansion and agility. I left with a greater enjoyment of ambiguity, fluidity and uncertainty — which, while somewhat unsettling at the time, made it easier, 20 years later, to cope with the rapid change and

vagaries of the new media world. The fellowship provided a pivot for career change and personal growth, the weather was terrific and I made some close friends."

— **Jack Davis, President, Tribune Interactive Fellow '78**

## The 1999-2000 John S. Knight FELLOWSHIPS at Stanford



**T**welve journalists win Knight Fellowships at Stanford each year. What do they get? Nine months of study, intellectual growth, and personal change at one of the world's great universities — in classes, in independent studies, and in special seminars with guest speakers. At the end of the year they return to their news organizations, better prepared for the rapidly changing world of journalism at the end of the 20th century.

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[www.stanford.edu/dept/communication/general/knightfellow.html](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/communication/general/knightfellow.html)

# CJR POLL AFTER MONICA WHAT NEXT?

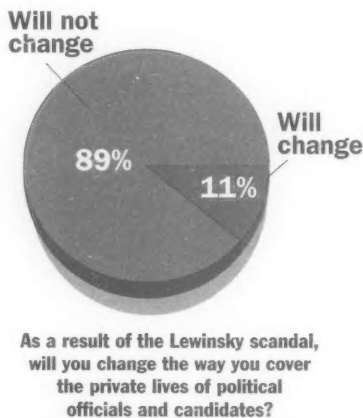
BY NEIL HICKEY

- About six out of ten senior journalists give the press a high grade (A or B) for its coverage of the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky White House scandal, but well over a third firmly believe the profession deserves a lowly C, D, or F for its performance.
- Only about a tenth of journalists plan to change the way they cover public officials' private lives as a result of the Lewinsky story.
- Almost two-thirds of journalists think that many promising and effective office-holders have been driven from public life by intense press scrutiny of their personal lives.
- But well over half disagree with the notion that journalists' own personal lives, including their sexual behavior, should be held to the same high moral standards as those applied to political officials.

Those are a few of the findings in a *Columbia Journalism Review* national poll of 125 senior journalists, the first in a new, continuing feature aimed at probing how print and electronic news people feel about major issues facing them in an increasingly turbulent period for the press.

The poll was conducted in conjunction with Public Agenda, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization. It was confidential, but more than four out of ten respondents agreed to follow-up telephone interviews to elaborate on their answers. Many others contributed brief essays to flesh out their answers.

While only 1 percent of journalists give their profession an outright flunking grade for handling the ten-month-long



NOTE: PERCENTAGES FOR ALL CHARTS MAY NOT EQUAL 100% BECAUSE OF MULTIPLE RESPONSES OR ROUNDING. SURVEY RESULTS BASED ON RESEARCH BY CJR AND PUBLIC AGENDA.

(so far) saga of Bill and Monica (not to mention Ken and Hillary), only 6 percent believe that journalists deserve the top grade. Tom Rawlins, senior editor of the *St. Petersburg Times*, marks the report card with a humble C, but blames cable television for "dragging all other coverage down." When people say they're angry at the media, he declares, what they often mean is that they're peeved at cable, which is "full of spin doctors shouting at each other." He calls cable news "Jerry Springer without the hair-pulling." MSNBC is less a news channel than "a forum for lobbyists," he insists, and wonders why Tom Brokaw didn't resign when the network hired Geraldo Rivera. A pervasive lack of journalistic discipline allows biased pundits to prattle



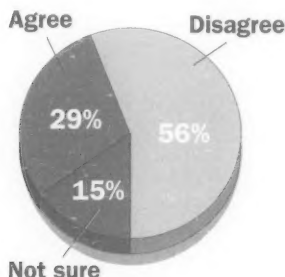


**“Cable news is full of spin doctors shouting at each other . . . Jerry Springer without the hair pulling.”**

Tom Rawlins, editor, *St. Petersburg Times*

on for hours, Rawlins says. They're "professional manipulators of information, and we sit back and let them do that and don't hold them responsible."

Many respondents scolded their colleagues for misplaced priorities, pointing out that most news organizations have never devoted to foreign affairs, health care, the budget, or the military the same ardent coverage bestowed on the Lewinsky affair. James E. Shelledy, editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, claims that "competitive juices overtook common sense." He wonders: How many papers would have printed the entire Starr report if it had focused on Whitewater instead of sex, and contained the same allegations about perjury, witness tampering, and obstruction of justice? "Those issues, we are told, are the reasons we're supposed to be excited about all this, which is utter bullshit. Sex has driven this from the start. Sex and the Beltway's obsession with scandal."



**Journalists' personal lives - including their sexual behavior - should be held to as high a moral standard as the personal lives of political officials.**

Starr injected plenty of sex into the report in order to get it covered, Shelledy claims, and the media were eager, compliant partners in that objective. (He adds: "And we make fun of the tabloids who put a nude on page three.") Even

though people gobble up this coverage, the press has sorely injured itself with the public, he feels sure, fostering the belief that "we don't have good priorities, that we're always looking for the sensational." The whole Clinton/Lewinsky tale "has taken the press into a new era, and it's not going to be pretty." His grade for the overall coverage: a feeble D.

Bill Endicott, deputy managing editor of *The Sacramento Bee*, says that if newspapers hadn't published the Starr report, they would have been accused of sup-

**WHAT GRADE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THE OVERALL PRESS COVERAGE OF THE MONICA LEWINSKY SCANDAL?**

<input type="checkbox"/> A	6%
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B	55%
<input type="checkbox"/> C	23%
<input type="checkbox"/> D	14%
<input type="checkbox"/> F	1%
Not sure	2%

porting the president. "When we did print it, people called us pornographers."

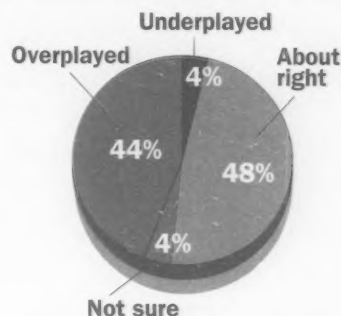
Why do so many people think the media have drastically overplayed this story? Bill Marimow, managing editor of the *Baltimore Sun*, says his hunch is that the unwelcome tonnage of salacious detail is what has made the public holler, "Enough already!"

Says Ron Thornburg, managing editor of the *Standard-Examiner* in Ogden, Utah: "Many believe that what politicians and journalists talk about in Washington has little connection with what's going on in ordinary people's lives." When the political discourse is so dominated by subjects that don't matter to them, he finds, readers and viewers either tune out or become irritated by the news they consume. They care more, says Thornburg, about crowded schools, public transportation, and local referenda. Still, he detected a subtle shift in that position, starting when the threat of a presidential impeachment became a real possibility.

Almost half of our sample is sure that

the volume of Lewinsky coverage has been "about right," even though the public in huge numbers thinks otherwise. (A gluttonous 4 percent of our respondents has the view that the story has been underplayed.)

Making editorial decisions based on polls of reader interest is a losing game,



**Overall, do you think this story has been overplayed, underplayed, about right, not sure?**

according to Linda Lightfoot, executive editor of *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. A journalist's job is to be totally focused on stories this important, she maintains, no matter what the public wants. "I don't think we should let people who are not concerned about important affairs dictate our coverage," she says. "The fact that a president of the United States might be impeached is extremely important, whether people are tired of hearing about it or not."

More than half the journalists we polled in conjunction with Public Agenda feel that people seeking public office have to accept that their most intimate secrets are likely to be exposed by enterprising reporters. But a surprisingly large segment — almost four out of ten — are extremely leery about such invasions of privacy. A number of jour-



**“Sex has driven this from the start.**

**Sex and the Beltway's obsession with scandal.”**

James E. Shelledy, editor, *Salt Lake Tribune*

*Additional reporting on this story was done by CJR's assistant editor Nicholas Stein.*



**“Many believe that what politicians and journalists talk about in Washington has little connection with what’s going on in ordinary people’s lives.”**

**Ron Thurnburg, managing editor, *Standard-Examiner*, Ogden, Utah**

nalists made important distinctions about when — and when not — to cover politicians’ private lives.

Examples: office-seekers who parade their families in television commercials, print ads, and during stump speeches and conduct righteous, “family values” campaigns are making themselves a fair target for investigative reports — especially if their personal standards don’t match up with their public ones. Similarly: to avoid legitimate media scrutiny, candidates who loudly promise to run government on sound business principles, and others who evangelize against extramarital sex, had better be sure there are no bankruptcies or hot-sheet motel room trysts in their pasts.

That said, a consensus exists that the press should not invade anyone’s privacy without cause. Says the *St. Petersburg*

*Times’s* Rawlins: “Generally, the private lives of public officials should remain so.” But a substantial majority of the poll sample draws the line at private behavior that affects public performance, and officials’ ability to handle their jobs. “Just because somebody is elected to public office,” says David Bauer, editor of *The Daily News* in Bowling Green, Ohio, “doesn’t mean journalists should hang out in his shower stall.”

One editor declares that “few politicians are targeted without reason,” and points to Wilbur Mills, Wayne Hayes, and Ted Kennedy, as well as to Bill Clinton.



**“I don’t think we should let people who are not concerned about important affairs dictate our coverage.”**

**Linda Lightfoot, executive editor of *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

Many more, he suspects, escape. But always, the investigation “must be fair and above-board and the subject must be given a chance to respond. If we err at all, it should be on the side of kindness.”

Some comments on when it’s legiti-



**“If a politician spouts family-value rhetoric and has a secret second family, that’s news.”**

**Narda Zacchino, associate editor and vice president, the *Los Angeles Times***

mate to probe private lives:

■ David Hall, editor, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: “When private behavior contradicts public statements, or when a candidate or official tells voters how to behave in their private lives.”

■ Narda Zacchino, associate editor and vice president, the *Los Angeles Times*: “When the story is relevant to an office holder’s position and responsibilities. If a gay-basher turns out to be gay, that’s relevant. If a politician spouts family-value rhetoric and has a secret second family, that’s news.”

■ Phelps Hawkins, executive producer, news, New Jersey Network: “When there’s clear potential impact on one’s ability to do the job. Each successive level of inquiry must meet recurring tests of the public’s need to know, following the core dictates of fairness and balance.”



**“Each successive level of inquiry must meet recurring tests of the public’s need to know,”**

**Phelps Hawkins, executive producer, news, New Jersey Network**

All of which leads to the nettlesome question: Should journalists’ own private lives and secret foibles be ventilated in public the same way that public officials’ often are? Should their morals be judged by the same high standards? Opinions vary:

■ No, says Sharon Rosenhouse, managing editor, news, *San Francisco Examiner*. “We don’t get elected, so we don’t have to account for our policies or expenses.”

■ Yes, counters Richard Scott, news director, WPHL-TV, Philadelphia: “If you

When private behavior affects public performance

When private behavior is illegal/criminal

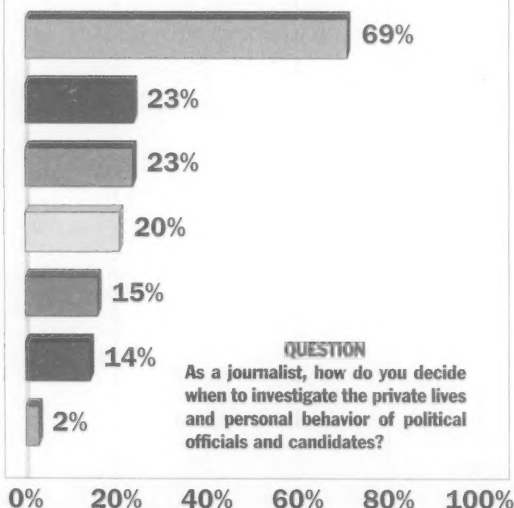
When private behavior is at odds with public statements

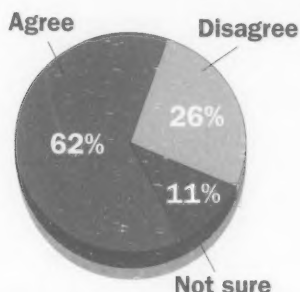
When private behavior is unethical and improper

When private behavior is “news”

Other

When private behavior is demeaning to the office





The intense scrutiny by the press of the personal lives of public officials has probably driven some of our most prominent politicians out of political life.

put your byline in the paper, your voice on the radio, or your face on TV, you should be prepared to face the same scrutiny as any public official." That goes double for Jennings, Rather, and Brokaw, he insists, because they're bigger celebrities than most office holders. ■ No, insists Ralph Langer, editor and executive vice-president, *The Dallas Morning News*: Since public officials deserve privacy (unless their malefactions affect public policy), then journalists deserve the same deal.

■ Yes, declares Victoria Jones, a producer at WHDH-TV, Boston: If the rules were the same, journalists "would be a



"Journalists don't get elected, so we don't have to account for our policies or expenses."

Sharon Rosenhouse, managing editor, news, *San Francisco Examiner*

lot more careful, a lot more thoughtful, and have more empathy. We've lost our ability to empathize, to be human."

While an overwhelming percentage of our sample insist they'll make no big changes in the way they treat public figures' private lives, the Lewinsky case clearly has initiated a wholesale reappraisal of news handling in newsrooms across America. Many journalists say they'll exercise much more restraint in passing along unverified reports, especially those from the Internet; and they'll

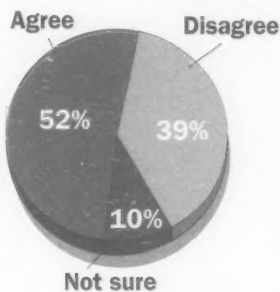


"Are we going to see more of these stories being covered in the future? You bet."

Bob Quinn, talk radio WHO, Des Moines

be using far more discretion about the relevance of private details. In the words of one respondent: "It will make us more thoughtful and cautious." Another: "We must get better at what we do!"

But other journalists agree with the



People who choose to be in public office should accept that their intimate private lives are fair game for scrutiny by the news media.

newspaper editor who declared: "I see no need for radical surgery in the press." A news director in Des Moines, Iowa, Bob Quinn of talk-radio WHO, says the reason he won't be altering cov-



"If you put your byline in the paper, your voice on the radio, or your face on TV, you should be prepared to face the same scrutiny as any public official."

Richard Scott, news director, WPHL-TV, Philadelphia

erage is that his audience tells him in their phone-in comments that the White House scandal is still the big "water-cooler" story. "We know the audience is interested. They tell us that," he says. "Are we going to see more of these stories being covered in the future? You bet." "It's hard to put the genie back in the bottle," says David Busiek, news director of KCCL-TV, Des Moines, Iowa.

Taking a more cosmic view, Susan Ungaro, editor of *FamilyCircle*, thinks that the Clinton/Lewinsky drama has created "a real turning point for all



"We should have the public interest and not the bottom line at heart or else all we can do is wait for a time when sex doesn't sell."

Susan Ungaro, editor *FamilyCircle*

media." In the future, will news persons be driven, more so than ever, to swarm all over sensational stories in pursuit of circulation and ratings? She fears that may happen: "We should have the public interest and not the bottom line at heart or else all we can do is wait for a time when sex doesn't sell." ■

## ABOUT THE CJR POLL

These findings report the views of 125 editors and news directors from print and broadcast media who responded to a questionnaire sent by fax on September 11; responses received through September 18 were tabulated.

The *Columbia Journalism Review* drew the names from membership lists of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the American Society of Magazine Editors, the Radio-Television News Directors Association, the Associated Press Managing Editors, and the National Association of Black Journalists. Pollsters would call this a non-random, self-selected sample. To get these findings online, visit our website at [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org), or Public Agenda's at [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org).

# SPOT NEWS

## THE PRESS AND THE DRESS

BY LAWRENCE K. GROSSMAN

**"O**f all the stories we reported involving the president and Monica Lewinsky, ABC was most vilified for our reports about the semen-stained dress," says ABC News Washington correspondent Jackie Judd. "Critics kept asking, 'where's the proof?' Most people think it was the story's 'yuk' factor that made us so unpopular, but there was more to it than that."

Here is an account of how the press covered the bizarre story of the semen-stained dress (photo, right), which was more accurately reported than most critics have been willing to admit, and what that coverage reveals about the journalism in today's high intensity, echo-chamber world of cyberspace.

Jackie Judd first reported the semen-stained dress story on ABC's *World News Tonight* on Friday, January 23: "Lewinsky says she saved, apparently as some kind of souvenir, a navy blue dress with the president's semen stain on it. If true, this could provide physical evidence of what really happened." Judd repeated her account later that night on 20/20.

Surprisingly, in the first draft of her script, Judd had failed to mention anything about the dress, even though she had nailed down the basic facts from two trusted sources and had alerted her editors in New York to the story. Asked why she held back, Judd told me, "At that stage, only the third day into the Lewinsky scandal, I was still squeamish about putting a story like that on the air. It was all new territory for us."

*Lawrence K. Grossman is a former president of NBC News and PBS.*



But Judd's editors persuaded her to revise her script and report the facts she had learned about the dress with President Clinton's semen stain still on it. The dress, they argued, would be "the smoking gun" that could contradict the president's denials and take the scandal out of the "he-said, she-said" cul-de-sac in which it seemed to be stuck.

Judd was not the first to go public with the story. That distinction went to

cyber gossip Matt Drudge, who had posted his attention-getting scoop on the Internet two days earlier. On Wednesday, January 21, his heavily trafficked *Drudge Report* broke the news that Linda Tripp had told investigators Lewinsky claimed she "kept the garment with Clinton's dried semen in it — a garment she allegedly said she would never wash." Drudge repeated the story the next morning in an interview on NBC's *Today* show.

However, it was Judd's January 23 report on ABC that was the first in the mainstream media to rely on the reporter's own sources, rather than on secondhand information from Drudge. Peter Jennings introduced Judd's report this way: "Today, someone with specific knowledge of what it is that Monica Lewinsky says really took place between her and the president has been talking to ABC's Jackie Judd."

Where Judd got the dress story has become a matter of trademark controversy. Last June, in the premiere issue of *Brill's Content*, media critic Steve Brill accused Judd of basing her report on an untrustworthy, biased single source, Lucianne Goldberg, the self-confessed Clinton-hater. He wrote, "Although Judd would not comment on her source, Lucianne Goldberg told me that she herself is the source for this Jackie Judd report and for others that would follow." While Goldberg, a New York book agent, claimed to have given Judd the story, she denied to Brill that she had been the source for the Drudge scoop, even though in January she had bragged to the *New York Daily News*: "The dress story? I think I leaked that . . . I had to do something to get [the media's] attention. I've done it. And I'm not unproud

RUSTY BURROUGHS THE ENQUIRER/JOURNAL/AF WIDEWORLD PHOTOS



of it." Brill's article charged, "[W]hen it turns out that [the president] stained one dress or one hundred dresses, Judd's every utterance is infected with the clear assumption that the president is guilty at a time when no reporter can know that."

In her own defense, Judd insisted to me that she had adhered to ABC's two-source rule on the dress story. She got her information, she said, from two sources she knew well and considered to be reliable, a fact confirmed by ABC News senior vice president Richard C. Wald, who oversees the network's news standards. Judd says she had met Goldberg only once briefly, and "spoke to her only for thirty seconds or less." It was made clear that Brill was mistaken in his assertion that Goldberg was her source.

I asked Judd why, in her January 23 piece, both she and Jennings had referred to only a single source for the story, when now she says she had relied on two sources. "The first person who told me about the dress told it to me off the record on condition that I not use it," Judd replied. "Then I confirmed the story from another source who insisted on anonymity, but who did not say we couldn't run it. So, to be accurate, we cited only one source on *World News Tonight*."

**D**rudge, as was his custom, had cited no source for his story of January 21. But his revelation earned the former Hollywood gift shop clerk with no journalistic credentials an interview on *Today*, the number one network morning news show. Most mainstream journalists disdain *The Drudge Report*. They consider it not a legitimate news outlet but a gossip sheet posted on the Internet, where anybody can report or expose anything as fact whether true or not. Nevertheless, with many scoops about recent scandals to his credit, Drudge has become a hot media property. The Fox News Channel has given him his own news-gossip show.

Introducing Drudge on *Today*, co-anchor Matt Lauer described *The Drudge Report* as "a media gossip page known for below-the-Beltway reporting." Lauer then asked his guest about his semen-stained dress story that had appeared on the Internet the day before. Said Drudge: "I have reported that there's a potential DNA trail that would

tie Clinton to this young woman." Lauer asked Drudge if he had any confirmation. Drudge answered, "Not outside of what I've just heard, but I don't think anybody does at this point."

Another *Today* guest that morning was *Newsweek*'s Michael Isikoff, whose reporting on the president's sex scandals had earned him a consulting contract with NBC. Appearances by *Newsweek* staffers on television's rapidly expanding schedule of talk shows generate valuable publicity for the magazine, part of the high decibel ricochet effect of today's nonstop multimedia environment. *Time* has even installed a small TV studio in its New York offices so its editors and reporters can appear on screen at the drop of a newsbreak.

Lauer asked Isikoff if he heard anything about the dress. An experienced journalist, Isikoff knew better than to speculate on network television: "I have not reported that, and I am not going to report that until I have evidence that it is, in fact, true," he said. "I've heard lots of wild things, as I am sure you have. But you don't go on the air and blab them."

Still, simply by appearing on NBC News's highly regarded *Today*, the stained-dress story immediately graduated from gossip to news, gaining a measure of credibility and legitimacy despite the fact that no mainstream journalist had yet verified it. At that point, NBC News had done none of its own reporting on the story or gotten any independent verification. Landing a guest who makes a bombshell revelation on an established show like *Today* is a ploy guaranteed to gain instant worldwide attention, as Drudge's interview certainly did.

The beauty of getting the guest to deliver the sensational news is that the network itself doesn't have to hold back and risk being scooped on the story

until its own reporters and editors are satisfied that it is accurate. No one at the network has to spend time and money digging for facts. Even better, if the story turns out to be wrong, the network has an out: "Matt Drudge said it; we didn't. We were only doing our job trying to find out from him whether it was true." This can be a dubious practice, and lately it has become all too commonplace, especially on cable talk shows.

A story of that magnitude appearing on *Today* also creates a king-sized dilemma for the rest of the press. Editors ask themselves, "Now that it's been on *Today*, shouldn't we carry it? True, we have no verification ourselves, but neither does anybody else. The fact that *Today* carried the story is itself news. Besides, if we don't run it, you can bet other guys will." And so, before any reporter for the mainstream press had even checked the story out (Judd's



The beleaguered ABC News correspondent felt vindicated at last

piece on ABC did not appear until January 23, the day after Drudge's *Today* interview), the unsubstantiated gossip posted by Matt Drudge on the Internet had risen to the level of apparently credible news. NBC's Tom Brokaw calls this multimedia, echo-chamber effect, "the Big Bang theory of journalism." But is it journalism, or gossip-mongering on a worldwide scale?

On Thursday, January 22, while

## REPORTING

Drudge was dropping his bombshell on NBC's *Today*, Sam Donaldson was breaking an entirely different dress story on ABC's *Good Morning America*. Donaldson talked about a dress that, he said, the president had allegedly given Lewinsky as a gift. (Later on, *The New York Times* and many others were to confuse the gift dress with the semen-stained model.) "How do we know" about the gift? *Good Morning America* co-anchor Lisa McRee asked Donaldson. "Well," he replied, "I guess we don't know. We're talking about leaks." Donaldson's revelation on *GMA* is a textbook example of an unsourced, unsubstantiated, pseudo-fact, disseminated by

tions. The garment, in print, on-air, and on cable, was the blockbuster story of the week. The *New York Daily News* blared on page one, SHE KEPT SEX DRESS. The *New York Post* bannered, MONICA'S LOVE DRESS. Many newspaper and broadcast accounts picked up a UPI story that reported as fact that Lewinsky had kept a dress with Clinton's semen, eliminating the detail that Lewinsky had only *claimed* to have such a dress.

*Time* and *Newsweek*, released on Sunday, January 25, carried almost identical reports about the dress, adding a few marginally different details of their own. *Time*: In an untaped conversation with

ment. The next night on ABC, Judd, citing "law enforcement sources," said, "Starr so far has come up empty in a search for forensic evidence," explaining that the Lewinsky clothes the FBI tested had been dry cleaned. As it later turned out, dry cleaning had nothing to do with the absence of the semen stain; the FBI had tested the wrong garments. *The Washington Post* reported that President Clinton assured associates there was no such dress.

In the spring, the tale of the semen-stained dress fast lost credibility. Critics came forward in force. *The Toronto Star* wrote, "Take the notorious blue dress, the one said to have been stained with the president's 'residue.' Can anyone blame the public for not trusting wild and sometimes truly unbelievable daily news reports, no matter what medium?" A Cox News Service piece by Scott Shepard began, "The dress? It has vanished into the misty realm of yesterday's newspaper and last night's TV news broadcast." Shepard blamed "the well-traveled route of hearsay in today's brave new information world, where a few established 'facts' are repeated and mixed with speculation and allegations from unidentified sources." Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of the Annenberg School for Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, complained on PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* about the press's lack of careful sourcing and confirmation, citing allegations about the semen-stained dress. "It turns out now that there may be no dress."

Longtime TV news producer Ed Fohy, now at the Pew Center in Washington, D.C., deplored the apparent fact that, "so many good journalists [were] spending so much time analyzing so little." *Los Angeles Times* contributing editor Robert Scheer wrote of the press performance, "It's sick. There was no blue dress and no semen stain, but America's mass media fell for the lurid tales." *The New York Times* columnist Frank Rich blasted the reports of "phantom semen stains."

Then, at the end of July, Lewinsky and special prosecutor Kenneth Starr finally agreed on an immunity deal. On *World News Tonight*, July 29, Judd, citing legal sources (plural this time), revealed that "as part of the immunity deal with prosecutors, Monica Lewinsky agreed to turn over evidence she claimed would

*continued on page 38*

## The press got some things wrong, but the major facts right.

a reporter playing catch up, that simply feeds the public's distrust of the news media.

Donaldson was repeating a story that had been posted on *Newsweek-on-Line* the previous day. It said Lewinsky had been heard, on a tape in *Newsweek's* exclusive possession, claiming that Clinton had given her a dress as a present. *Newsweek's* Washington bureau chief Ann McDaniel repudiated this report two weeks later, explaining that the magazine's reporters had misinterpreted what they heard on the tape.

Other outlets would make a similar mistake. On Monday, January 26, for example, *The New York Times* reported, "People who have heard the tapes said Monica Lewinsky had reportedly claimed that Mr. Clinton gave her a dress and that it was later stained with semen." In fact, the claim was not on the tape and the dress that Lewinsky said had the stain was not the one the president allegedly gave her. *The Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Baltimore Sun*, among others, repeated that error on succeeding days. Did that story really come from "people who have heard the tapes," or did the reporters get it secondhand from *Newsweek-on-Line*, *GMA*, Drudge, or elsewhere and, as in the children's game Telephone, garble the information?

By Saturday morning, January 24, news of the *real* semen-stained dress hit the world and splattered in all direc-

Tripp, Lewinsky "allegedly held up a dress she claimed was stained with the president's semen and said, 'I'll never wash it again.'" *Newsweek*: "Lewinsky told Tripp that she was keeping, as a kind of grotesque memento, a navy blue dress stained with Clinton's semen. Holding it up as a trophy to Tripp, she declared, 'I'll never wash it again.'"

**N**either of the newsmagazines, which appear to have gotten their quotes from the same anonymous leaker, gave any indication of the nature of the source. A month later *Time* wrote, its "source was someone close to Tripp that *Time* believes credible." *Newsweek's* piece that week reported Lewinsky was given a dress by Clinton, although later the magazine said it was no longer sure there ever was a dress given to her by the president. *Newsweek*, however, did stand by its account that Lewinsky claimed she had the dress with Clinton's semen.

On Monday, January 26, *The New York Times* quoted Lewinsky's lawyer William Ginsburg dismissing press reports about the semen-stained dress: "I would assume that if Monica Lewinsky had a dress that was sullied or dirtied, she would have had it cleaned. I know of no such dress."

On Thursday, January 29, CBS News's Scott Pelley broke the story that the FBI had found no evidence on any of the clothes taken from Lewinsky's apart-

# TOO MUCH, TOO SOON

BY JAMES BOYLAN

Only hours after the release of the report of the Office of the Independent Counsel on Friday, September 11, editorial writers sprang to their terminals. Over the weekend, a hundred or so daily newspapers (out of the country's fifteen hundred) called on the president to resign. By the end of September, resignation.com, a site created by the political freebooter Arianna Huffington, listed 181 publications favoring resignation, most of them dailies.



This was not a partisan outburst. Newspapers of all sizes, regions, and political coloration joined

in. They ranged from *USA Today* to Nevada's *Daily Sparks Tribune*, and included a share of the traditionally moderate, pragmatic press — the *Des Moines Register*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Chicago Tribune*. I read twenty-two of them.

Despite the short time to prepare (and to think), the editorials were more than adequate examples of the editorial writer's art, stating their arguments cogently and dealing soberly with possible counter-arguments. The well-presented editorial in the *San Jose Mercury News* ran to almost 1,500 words. Most based their recommendation on two relatively simple and reasonable-sounding contentions — that Clinton's behavior had eroded the moral authority of his presidency; that he should spare the country the prolonged impeachment process.

Many expressed virginal horror over the plethora of sexual detail. The first paragraph of the Augusta, Georgia, *Chronicle's* editorial was one word: "Disgusting." Little Rock's *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* suggested, in apparent innocence, that the Starr report should have been accompanied with mouthwash. (In *The New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik theorized that the press's protected existence "gives indignant newspaper editorials their charm, like the cheese produced by monks.")

Indeed, it was the sexual detail in the report that furnished the ammunition for so many editorialists urging an immediate

aborting of the Clinton presidency. Not for them drawn-out hearings, tedious wrangling, or long national nightmare. They implied that Clinton would be smart to start packing as soon as he read the morning papers. The more realistic conceded that their arguments were moot — that, of course, Clinton was not about to resign.

Though it served as the trigger, the Starr report received surprisingly little analysis from the editorial writers. Rather than showing why the report was to be believed, they assumed its credibility. Some hinted that it sounded to them something like a newspaper investigative piece — an engrossing narrative followed by damning conclusions. *The Cincinnati Post* was not alone in finding "relentless, convincing, excruciating detail." The editorials I read rarely made clear that the report was an extended accusation rather than a verdict — the first straw rather than the last.

Behind the content of the editorials lay an assumed authority, the belief that the press has every right to tell the public that its elected president should remove himself from office forthwith. Says Robert Giles, head of the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Center: "Their editorial page staffs spend a lot of time reading and discussing the important issues of the day, and that gives a great deal more weight to what they have to say as opposed to public opinion polling and what's said in a two-minute telephone interview."

Of course, the press is free under the First Amendment to recommend almost anything it chooses. But it might find its positions taken more seriously if it were to explain itself better. Journalism rarely reveals that it is not just a detached onlooker but a participant in government, a loosely organized Fourth Branch. Its functions are well defined by tradition: it provides a check on government and a check on abuses of the Executive power in particular. In pursuit of this end it makes alliances with legislative investigators, whistle-blowers, and prosecutors.

The resignation editorials failed to acknowledge that the credibility of the Starr report was built to a great degree on eight months of preparation in the news media, a melange of reporting, leaks, and

speculation that made the scandal, as Clinton remarked in his grand jury testimony, "the most important issue in America." Editorial writers may believe they are sealed off from all that turmoil. Wrong; they are part of the machinery.

The tacit alliance of prosecutorial agencies and the press has served the country well enough in the past, starting with Teapot Dome, through the Pentagon

## The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Papers and Watergate. Yet editorial writers in this instance pretended that the press merely looked on while Clinton self-destructed (which, to a certain extent, he did). Did they have a sneaking sense that the Lewinsky scandal would not resonate as gloriously as Watergate? Bad luck; even the most inattentive readers and viewers had to know that some elements in the press have been as avid as Kenneth Starr to get rid of the president. And the newspapers that called for his resignation were bound to be read as trying to take a shortcut.

It soon became clear that when newspapers ran their Clinton resignation editorials, the issue was by no means ripe for such measures. By contrast, the editorials

## San Jose Mercury News

that called for the resignation of Richard Nixon in November 1973 — notably the first editorial that *Time* magazine had run in half a century of existence — came at a much later point, after a summer of Senate hearings, after the firing of the special prosecutor, after Nixon had reached, in *Time's* words, a widely recognized "tragic point of no return." Then, the press helped to build a public consensus rather than trying to wish one into being.

## Chicago Tribune

There was no published tabulation of other editorial reactions to the Starr report — of newspapers that favored letting the constitutional processes move forward for now. These included such major voices as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. But the most pointed warning against haste appeared in the *New York Daily News*: "The American public must reserve judgment. As in ordinary trials, the prosecution goes first, the defense follows. Only then is the verdict rendered." The segment of the press that called immediately for resignation was in effect asking for the verdict right after the prosecution's opening statement. ■

James Boylan is CJR's founding editor.



## REPORTING

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back up her story that she had a sexual relationship with the president. The sources confirm that one piece of evidence is, in fact, the dress Lewinsky said she saved after an encounter with Mr. Clinton because it had a semen stain on it. Lewinsky's claim of the dress's existence was first reported by ABC News six months ago. The dress may provide Starr with forensic evidence of a relationship."

As Judd's script made clear, the beleaguered ABC News correspondent felt vindicated at last.

The next day, July 30, on CNN's *Inside Politics*, CNN White House correspondent Wolf Blitzer revealed the astonishing news that Lewinsky had given the stained dress to her mother, who, he said, hid it in her New York apartment for six months. According to Blitzer, when the president agreed to testify to the grand jury, he was unaware that Lewinsky would be turning over the dress with its physical evidence of their sexual relationship.

The blue dress with the president's semen stain existed after all. It was real. And it had returned to center stage.

That same day, like a recurring nightmare, an improbable connection was made between the dress and the O.J. Simpson murder case. Former Los Angeles police detective Mark Fuhrman, a key witness in the Simpson trial, appeared on MSNBC, the cable news channel that gained the dubious reputation of programming "All Monica, All the Time." Fuhrman revealed that he had been contacted the previous October by his one-time book agent Goldberg, who asked him how DNA could be extracted from a dress.

In their August 10 editions, both *Time* and *Newsweek* reported that Goldberg and Tripp had plotted to get their hands on Lewinsky's dress, take a swab of the stain if they could, and have it tested for semen themselves. Goldberg described their scheme, which sounded like a dark soap opera mystery: Tripp allegedly called Lewinsky and told her she was so broke she would like to come over to Lewinsky's apartment while Lewinsky was away to check out her wardrobe and borrow a dress. Would Lewinsky tell her doorman to let her in? Tripp's plan to get at the blue dress with the semen stain

did not succeed. Lewinsky failed to respond, according to Goldberg. *Time* reported the Goldberg tale and concluded, "Tripp's associates say that story is not true." *Newsweek* credited "sources familiar with the investigation" for its account.

On August 4, the *New York Post* reported that Goldberg claimed to have declined an offer of \$500,000 from the *National Enquirer* for a photo of Lewinsky wearing the infamous blue dress. Goldberg said the photo exists but since it was not in her possession, she had to turn down the offer. According to the *New York Post*, Goldberg said: "This is not about money. This is about right and wrong, . . . adding with a wicked chortle, 'Besides, I don't have it [the photo].'"

In hindsight, it is easy to be critical of those who beat up on the press for its "phantom dress" reports before the full story came out. It is also somewhat unfair. It is now clear that Matt Drudge's scoop on the dress turned out to be essentially accurate. So did the reports by Jackie Judd, Wolf Blitzer, and most other reporters. The issue here is not about how the press spread misinformation; when it came to the dress, the press got some things wrong, but the major facts right. Still, too many news organizations paid too little attention to basic rules of the trade in their hot pursuit of the story. In today's non-stop news environment, the real issue is: How can the press overcome the public's growing distrust, even when it gets the story right? (See "Rebuilding Trust," page 39.)

Many critics have complained that the press has been promiscuous in its use of anonymous sources. But those who urge the press to "Stop using anonymous sources," as former Poynter Institute president Robert J. Haiman did recently, are unrealistic. It was virtually impossible to find a firsthand source in the special prosecutor's office, the White House, or anywhere else willing to be quoted on the record. Reporters had no choice but to rely largely on anonymous leakers and spinners. The dress story could never have been reported by any news medium that held to the ideal journalistic standard of full disclosure.

Certainly, reporters try to persuade

their sources to go on the record. But failing that, they should at least indicate the level of the sources' direct knowledge and the nature of their vested interest. People recognize that it is all too easy for anonymous sources with axes to grind to avoid accountability and therefore, to lie, mislead, or exaggerate.

A study commissioned by the Committee of Concerned Journalists examined the reporting of the first six days of the scandal, in which the dress played a central role. It concluded that: "Nearly one in three statements (30 per cent of what was reported) was effectively based on no sourcing at all by the news outlet publishing it." Also: "Four in ten statements (41 per cent of the reportage), out of 'the 1,565 statements and allegations contained in the reporting [of the scandal] by major television programs, newspapers, and magazines . . . were not factual reporting at all . . . but were instead journalists offering analysis, opinion, speculation, or judgment.'"

Those who practice journalism in the volatile new media age could do worse than abide by a few of the old fashioned rules from a more leisurely time, before the arrival of the endless news cycle: When sources insist on anonymity, disclose enough about their connection with the story so the audience can judge both their trustworthiness and the story's. Take care to separate fact from speculation and reporting from commentary. In covering personal and private matters that go public, restraint and dignity are more credible than excessive and unseemly enthusiasm. Resist the rush to judgment; it's better for the audience to reach its own conclusions based on the facts. Above all, before going with anyone's gossip, no matter how explosive, check it out.

Recently, in a special message to journalists, Pope John Paul II stressed the need for still greater responsibility in the age of the Internet and other speedy information systems. The pope called on journalists to "transmit information while respecting truth, fundamental ethical principles, and personal dignity." It's advice from a credible source, and it's worth heeding. ■



# REBUILDING TRUST

BY RICHARD LAMBERT

**B**y any measure, public trust in America's news organizations has been declining for years. People are progressively less inclined to believe what they see and read. The press used to be viewed as playing a crucial role in keeping politicians clean, but the public increasingly thinks that the press is keeping political leaders from doing their jobs properly.

For almost a year, the drama in Washington has highlighted this disconnect between newspeople and their readers and viewers. Polls show that some 60 percent of the public are prepared to let the president get on with his job. The widespread perception that the media are avid

*Richard Lambert, the editor of Britain's Financial Times, has just completed a fourteen-month tour of duty in the U.S.*

## *Some ideas from an outside expert*

to bring down a popular president is yet another blow to public trust in journalism.

Does it really matter if a growing number of citizens don't trust large segments of the press? Ben Bradlee, former editor of *The Washington Post*, is doubtful. As he told me, "We journalists are not there to be loved. And I don't know that other professions are getting more respect. Not Congress, for chrissake. Not politicians. Not businessmen."

It's cold comfort, however, that the public has been losing faith not just in the media, but also in organized religion, labor unions, political parties, and many other institutions. Joseph Nye, dean of the faculty at Harvard's Kennedy

School, says, "In the long term, the quality of life in a democracy is hindered by too much trust — and by too little trust. If people believe everything they are told, that isn't healthy. But if they believe nothing, that isn't healthy either."

Nye's concern goes to the heart of the distinctive role of the press in the U.S., the extraordinary freedom granted to journalists by the First Amendment. Michael Parks, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, worries that "Some of us tend to forget why we have these privileges. It's so that we can have informed citizens who know what's going on, and can debate and participate in government. We have these privileges to use in trust."

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Can this freedom be taken for granted? Marvin Kalb thinks not. The director of the Joan Shorenstein Center for Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard, he worries that if the public service ethos gets forgotten, and the news becomes just another product to be squeezed out and sold like toothpaste, the special privileges may be endangered. "If you have lost your distinctiveness, what gives you the right to claim you are distinctive? The answer is: nothing."

So what's to be done?

Three different ways exist to deal with perceived excesses of the media, and countries around the world have tried them all in various combinations.

## U.S. newspeople don't know how lucky they are

One is by legislation. Another is by collective action among news organizations, or some form of mutual self regulation. The third is by the efforts of individual news organizations to build faith and trust with their audiences — each in its own way.

Even those U.S. critics who are most hostile to the press rightly draw the line well before they get to government intervention. They may question the practice, but hardly ever the principle, of the First Amendment. A year or so ago, I spoke to a group of British and American business leaders, most of whom took the opportunity to say how much they loathed the news media. At the end of this barrage, I asked for a show of hands on who felt there should be government restrictions on the press. Every British hand went up: not a single American moved. Most of the Americans could hardly understand the question.

American newspeople don't know how lucky they are. Even the most liberal and advanced nations impose restrictions on the press. In Britain, journalists often lament that a Watergate would never be uncovered because of the country's tough libel laws. France also has restrictive privacy laws. It's not just because the French are so sophisticated that you don't read about the love

life of leading politicians: journalists can be taken to court for such indiscretions.

So, thankfully, forget about legislation in the U.S. But what about collective action by, say, a self-regulating body of editors who would agree on rules, say, to respect privacy or restrict the use of graphic and disturbing battlefield photos? Well, forget about that, too. Most U.S. journalists instinctively shy away from the idea of some industry-wide code of conduct, and with good reason. There are genuine differences about what constitutes a matter of public interest. What seems fair game to one editor might well be off limits to another.

Also, this is an extremely competitive industry. If a newspaper's editors think

they can score points over a deadly rival by cutting a corner on an industry-wide code of conduct, then they may be tempted to do so whatever the agreed rule book might say.

Yet there *are* ways in which news organizations can act together to help reverse the downward spiral in their relationship with the public. One small step is being taken by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, which is sponsoring a very ambitious "journalism credibility project." It will attempt to define a set of values essential to the good name of the newspaper industry. So far, the output is rather on the lines of motherhood and apple pie. But the project is about to get more meaty. A large survey of public views on press credibility is scheduled to be released in November, and eight newspapers have joined in as test cases to work out how to identify and share best practices, such as the best ways of handling corrections or sourcing stories.

Many serious newspapers and magazines, TV and radio outlets have their own individual codes of conduct covering the ethical and reporting standards required of their staff. One obvious step would be for these codes to be compared in some public forum so that each organization could learn from the others, and the public could have a better idea of what they have a right to expect from different news suppliers.

Ben Bradlee listed a couple of best practices in his autobiography, *A Good Life*:

■ Beware of stories that you want to be true, for whatever reason. And beware the culture that allows unknown sources to be used too easily.

■ On a really big story, listen to at least one naysayer. Encourage reporters and editors to express their reservations about someone else's story, and to listen to reservations expressed by others about their own stories.

**T**hose two rules, properly observed, could have saved CNN and *Time* from charging that U.S. forces used nerve gas during the Vietnam war. They might have also spared *The Boston Globe* from going through bizarre contortions as it tried to deal with its wayward columnists, Patricia Smith and Mike Barnicle.

News organizations collectively could also establish guidelines for digging into the private life of a public figure. Former Senator Gary Hart, who knows a thing or two about this issue, suggests there could be three benchmarks:

Did the private behavior affect the way the public figure carried out his or her duties? Did it violate the accepted norms of the public office? Did it violate accepted public views of private behavior?

It is my view that under this, and almost any other set of criteria you care to think of, President Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky was a matter of public interest, as opposed to something that just happened to interest the public.

*Los Angeles Times* editor Michael Parks says he is less worried about press coverage of the private life of a public figure than he is about stories that exploit or offend children. One clause in the British newspaper editors' agreed Code of Practice that is worth consideration says that journalists should not interview or photograph children under the age of sixteen on subjects involving the welfare of the child, or of any other child, without the consent of a responsible adult.

In the U.S., as in the U.K., the public tends to have more trust in television than in print. A study for the Pew Research Center this year shows that in the last decade the networks have slipped down the believability scale while CNN has risen and now ranks at the very top in trust among all news organizations. On the print side, *The*

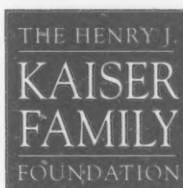
*Wall Street Journal* does well in polls of credibility and trustworthiness.

One reason may be that both these organizations — and many others that rank high — are rather functional in character. Their prime purpose is to inform rather than persuade or entertain. There may be a message here for some network news programs, which have increasingly moved away from hard news to softer themes, in which focus groups seem to play a distressingly large part.

A good way to win back trust is to get back to reporting the news. The sheer volume of space and time devoted to the

sexual aspects of the Lewinsky affair has displaced other important stories, and trivialized the discussion of the fate of the president. As I write, the U.S. economy is at a turning point, and much of the rest of the world economy has fallen down the plughole. An election campaign is under way in the U.S. None of this is getting enough coverage.

Too many news organizations have had a vested interest in the Lewinsky story. Publications which from the earliest days argued that the president might have to go could hardly let the matter slip off their front pages as the story



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## ISSUES

moved on. And there is something else. People turn to cable news channels when a big story is breaking; in quiet times, their ratings slide. Cable companies have a real interest in pursuing the big story that pulls in the viewers, notably a political drama that threatens the presidency.

The scandal has also brought out journalism in its most aggressive forms. Michael Parks says that the bare-knuckle approach can be traced back to Watergate: "If it's not a gotcha story, reporters and editors are likely to say there is no story there."

Every news organization has to decide whether it wants to follow on this bumpy track. Contrary to the fears of pessimists, there will be strong market forces driving in the opposite direction. As the number of outlets continues to multiply, news organizations will have to work much harder to differentiate themselves. News itself is already a commodity, available almost free of charge to anyone who wants it. As the world drowns in information, people will be willing to pay more for information they believe they can trust.

This means that old fashioned virtues

like accuracy, proper sourcing, fairness, and balance will become more — not less — valuable.

**O**bviously, the key to rebuilding trust between the press and the public lies in the hands of individual journalists. All the best practices and codes of conduct in the world will make no difference if they don't square with the culture and ethos of the individual newsroom.

There are three rules to setting the proper tone in a newsroom:

One is to have clear guidelines, in writing, about what constitutes unacceptable journalistic practice. These need to be kept permanently under review, and fresh in the minds of everyone working there.

Second, the tone has to be set by example. If editors allow corners to be trimmed in order to catch up or get ahead on a story, then the rule book will be useless. If they allow the agenda and the standards to be set by their rivals rather than by their own judgments, they will equally be lost.

Finally, on-the-job training has to play a much bigger part than in the past if reporters are going to add real value to the news, and to differentiate their print or broadcast news from the crowd: training in what lies behind the stories on individual beats; training in the editing processes; training in the skills of computer-based journalism. Above all, training about the values and culture that makes every newsroom different.

By international standards, American journalists are well trained and motivated people, with a high sense of purpose. British journalists call themselves hacks, and many of them behave accordingly. In contrast, there is an impressive feeling in many American newsrooms that journalists are doing a serious job in a serious way. U.S. newspapers are much more likely to have a code of ethics for their staff and a clear policy towards corrections than are most of their counterparts in Europe or Asia.

Moreover, a mood of pervasive self-criticism is in the air today, an awareness that things are not as they should be. The organizations that turn this into a constructive reappraisal of the way they cover the news will have the best shot in the years ahead at retaining and building trust with their audiences. ■

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## REPORTING

# DRUGS MISSING THE BIG STORY

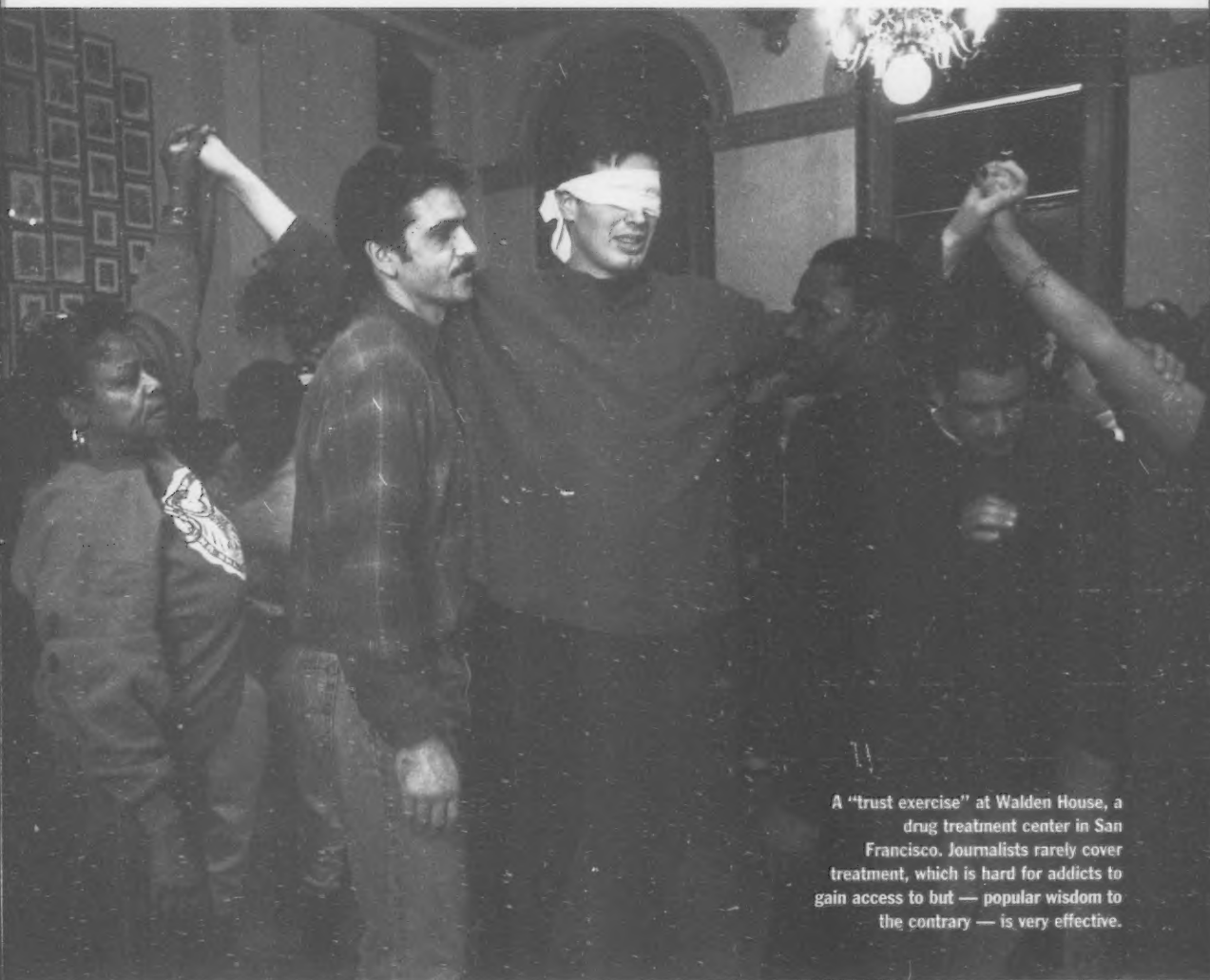
BY MICHAEL MASSING

When it comes to press coverage of the drug issue, the main action is in Mexico. American correspondents there pore over financial records, examine court documents, and interview officials to chronicle the pernicious effects drug trafficking has had on that country's political system. Meticulously researched, lushly documented, and numbingly detailed, these stories resemble the exposes of municipal malfeasance that were popular during the heyday of investigative journalism in the 1970s.

A typically knotty lead in *The New York Times*: "The

*Michael Massing, a contributing editor to CJR, is the author of The Fix, a book about America's drug problem, published in October by Simon & Schuster.*

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A "trust exercise" at Walden House, a drug treatment center in San Francisco. Journalists rarely cover treatment, which is hard for addicts to gain access to but — popular wisdom to the contrary — is very effective.

## REPORTING

longtime private secretary to a patriarch of Mexico's governing party has told American authorities about a series of dealings between narcotics traffickers and high-ranking political leaders, including members of the family of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari." Last November, *The Washington Post* ran a five-part, 17,000-word series on drug trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border and the violence and corruption it has spawned.

At a time when so many news organizations are cutting back foreign coverage, such a commitment of resources seems admirable, and the *Times*, for one, was rewarded this year with a Pulitzer Prize. Yet, in the rush to recount events in Tijuana and Juarez, the press has been neglecting another, more important front in the drug war — the battle at home.

In the U.S., the press favors two types of drug stories: teenage drug use (TEEN DRUG CRISIS, headlined the *New York Post*, August 21, 1996) and well-to-do junkies (HEROIN'S HOLD ON HOLLYWOOD, *Entertainment Weekly* cover story, August 9, 1996). Or both (HEROIN ALERT: ROCKERS, MODELS, AND THE NEW

DRUG CRISIS: ARE TEENS AT RISK? *Newsweek* cover story, August 26, 1996).

In reality, middle-class heroin addiction is neither new nor particularly widespread. And the rise of teen drug use in recent years is confined mostly to marijuana. National surveys affirm that America's drug problem consists mainly of a hard core of users who are disproportionately poor, unemployed, and black or Hispanic. There are about 3.6 million hard-core users, according to the federal government, and they consume an estimated 75 percent of the heroin and cocaine used in the United States. They also account for most of the crime, child abuse, overdose deaths, and other terrible consequences of drug use.

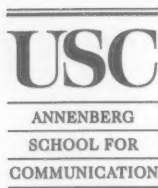
To the extent that these users surface in the media, it is usually in stories about street sweeps, prison overcrowding, or child welfare. What's missing is any sustained coverage of the really significant stories — the effectiveness of treatment in reducing addicts' dependence, and the difficulty they have in getting it.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy says that the U.S. treatment system has enough capacity to help only

half of those 3.6 million hard-core users. This is not by accident. For the last twenty years, drug treatment has been systematically underfunded at all levels of government. The result: long waiting lists for treatment in cities around the country. In New York state alone, an estimated 100,000 people who want treatment are unable to get it in any given year. Where are the news stories?

Part of the problem is the popular wisdom — in newsrooms as in the general public — that treatment does not work. Everybody knows someone who has done well in treatment, only to relapse soon after leaving it. Feeding this skepticism are the disparaging remarks about treatment made by politicians trying to look tough on drugs, such as New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who recently launched a stinging attack on methadone.

The polls — and the popular perceptions — are wrong. Take the case of a typical street junkie, an addict who's been injecting heroin or smoking crack for years and supporting his habit by shoplifting, robbing, or other hustles. While caught up in his drug-taking,



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such a person will not generally give much thought to treatment. But for most there comes a point when drug use begins to cause serious problems, from physical ailments to family dysfunction to trouble with the law, and when this happens many junkies become open to treatment.

They have several varieties to choose from. One is methadone. A synthetic opiate that blocks the craving for heroin, methadone is usually dispensed in clinics that require patients to come for a daily dose plus some counseling. Methadone works solely on heroin users, and most experts agree that to be fully effective it needs to be accompanied by an array of services, including vocational assistance. For addicts who use drugs other than heroin, or who use heroin but do not want to take methadone (daily trips to a clinic are not always possible), there are "drug-free" outpatient clinics, which offer intensive counseling and other services but no pharmaceuticals.

Addicts who feel the need for a more radical change in their lives can enroll in residential programs. Lasting anywhere from three months to two years, such programs commonly offer counseling, educational programs, and vocational training, all served up in a highly structured environment in which everything from meal hours to leisure time is strictly regulated.

A year in a residential program costs about \$18,000. Methadone costs \$4,000 to \$6,000 a year, and non-methadone outpatient programs even less. (Most programs that treat indigent addicts get money from Medicaid as well as direct grants from the federal or state government.) By contrast, a year in prison costs between \$25,000 and \$30,000, not including the sums spent on arrest and prosecution.

It is the relative cheapness that makes treatment so cost-effective. In a 1994 study, the RAND Corporation sought to compare the effectiveness of treatment with that of three other types of drug-control programs: local police action, border interdiction, and drug-suppression programs abroad. How much, RAND asked, would it cost to reduce cocaine use by 1 percent by relying on each of these four approaches? Using sophisticated computer analysis, RAND found that, relying solely on drug-fighting efforts abroad, the government would have to spend \$783 million more a year to reduce cocaine con-

sumption by 1 percent; relying on interdiction, it would have to spend \$366 million more, and on domestic law enforcement, \$246 million.

Relying solely on treatment, however, the government would have to spend only \$34 million more to achieve that 1 percent reduction. In other words, treatment was seven times more cost-effective than local law enforcement, ten times more effective than interdiction, and twenty-three times more effective than attacking drugs at their source.

Many other studies show that treatment works. In 1996, for instance, the

U.S. government released a study of hard-core users in treatment. The number using cocaine dropped from 39.5 percent before treatment to 17.8 percent a year later; for heroin, the number went from 23.6 percent to 12.6 percent. Overall, drug consumption decreased by roughly 50 percent.

This is not to deny the reality of relapse. Most addicts require two, three, or more exposures to treatment before the process takes hold. Over time, though, treatment produces dramatic reductions in drug use and related crime. In one analysis, California found



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## REPORTING

that, for every dollar invested in treatment, the state saved seven dollars, mostly from reductions in crime and health-care costs.

Despite all this, about two-thirds of the federal drug budget goes for law enforcement and interdiction, and only one-third for treatment and prevention. Press coverage of the drug issue is even more imbalanced. Newspapers and TV news programs rarely report on the mass of research demonstrating the effectiveness of treatment. Nor do they describe what happens to addicts who are turned away from treatment programs for lack of space.

Most striking of all is the lack of stories about how hard it is to gain entry to treatment. The drug treatment world is a balkanized and fractious place. Each program serves different populations, features different approaches, and has different admissions criteria. In most cities there's no central entry point where addicts can apply for help, no registry of which programs have openings. And, because treatment centers are so competitive, they will rarely refer a drug user to another program, even when they are full.

In some cases, there are even financial disincentives to helping addicts.

Most clinicians, for instance, agree that a patient completing detox will relapse if he is not referred to a longer-term program. But hospitals in New York state are reimbursed up to \$1,000 a day for each detox bed that is filled; if a patient relapses, his eventual return for another round of detox is almost guaranteed. Thus are hospitals rewarded for failure.

All in all, the nation's treatment system almost seems designed to make sure addicts don't get help. By any journalistic standard, this would seem a good story. Yet, in an extensive reading of newspaper clips, I found just one in-depth account of the trouble addicts have in getting into detox in New York City, the nation's drug capital. The four-part series appeared six years ago, in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Articles detailing the gaps in the treatment world are equally rare. In February 1997, Christopher Wren of *The New York Times* wrote about the shocking scarcity of methadone capacity nationwide (EX-ADDICTS FIND METHADONE MORE ELUSIVE THAN HEROIN). With more than 800,000 heroin addicts in the U.S., he noted, the nation's methadone clinics can accommodate only 115,000 of them. Eight states have no methadone at all.

Last August, *The Washington Post* ran a biting expose of chaos and disarray in the District of Columbia's drug treatment system (IN D.C., MANY ADDICTS AND FEW SERVICES). Reporter Peter Slevin described how many drug-using criminal offenders — mandated by judges to treatment — had to wait as long as six months behind bars because no beds were available. Slevin interviewed parole officers who were working the phones on behalf of their clients, desperately seeking treatment for them before they returned to a life of drugs and crime.

Journalists could tell similar stories in almost every large city. Few do. In terms of drama, reporting on the lack of treatment slots or the barriers to entering detox cannot compare with stalking drug lords in Mexico or watching coca fields being sprayed in Colombia. But tales of the treatment crisis may be more important stories.

By showing how poorly the treatment system is serving addicts, and yet how much promise treatment holds, news organizations could help bring about real reform. Doing so, though, would require sending reporters not just south of the border but down the street. ■

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# REPRESSION on the RESERVATION

BY KAREN LINCOLN MICHEL

In a country where press freedom is a constitutional guarantee, journalists working for American Indian-owned newspapers are denied the basic, fundamental First Amendment rights that are at the very root of news reporting.

Some 600 such publications — mostly weekly and monthly newspapers — are owned and controlled by leaders of Indian tribal governments. Most operate on the conviction that the job of the native press is merely to showcase the tribe's accomplishments — not to report the crimes, misdemeanors, and malfeasances that sometimes mark life on the reservation.

Tribal journalists lack protection of the First Amendment because its safeguards are accorded to the owner of the press — namely the tribal government — not the reporter. Native newspeople have little recourse against such oppression: Indian tribes enjoy a government-to-government relationship with the federal system, and their unique legal status as sovereign nations — a designation that predates the U.S. Constitution — shelters them from having to comply with intrusive laws such as the Freedom of Information Act. Censorship and verbal attacks by tribal leaders against Indian journalists are commonplace, often resulting in staff firings and even the shuttering of newspapers.

A study by Richard LaCourse, editor of the *Yakama Nation Review* in Wash-

## *Native American journalists are in a tough fight for their basic freedoms under the First Amendment*

ington state, says that only about seventy of the 557 federally-recognized American Indian tribes have free-press language in their constitutions, but even in those, it is routinely ignored by tribal leaders. In 1968, Congress passed the Indian Civil Rights Act, which extends First Amendment rights to reservations. But journalists working for tribal media insist that free-press guarantees provide little or no protection because tribal governments view their newspaper staffs as employees wholly answerable to tribal government.

It's a black eye on American journalism. Reporters and editors at many of these newspapers learn to walk a thin

line between reporting the truth and suffering the consequences. The threat is taken seriously because it comes from the boss who pays the news staff's salary: the tribal government.

Incidents of censorship and suppression are on the rise. Here are some recent examples:

■ In July 1997 the Cherokee tribal government laid off the entire staff of the bimonthly *Cherokee Nation* (circ.: 195,000) in Oklahoma. The newspaper was covering allegations of wrongdoing against the principal chief.

■ In June 1998 Frederick Lane, editor of the Lummi tribe's monthly newsletter, *Squol Quol*, was fired for failing to get his articles approved by representatives of the tribal council and tribal administration. Lummi tribal council secretary Tim Ballew said Lane had repeatedly run stories that opposed projects that the Lummi nation — a tribe of 4,500, located about ninety miles north of Seattle — had undertaken within the past four years.

■ In February 1998 the editor of the weekly *Navajo Times* in Arizona (circ.: 17,500) survived two attempts by the Navajo Nation administration to fire him, as the paper continued

**KAREN LINCOLN MICHEL, 39, is a Ho-Chunk Indian, free-lance writer, and former reporter for The Dallas Morning News. As a general assignment reporter at the La Crosse Tribune in Wisconsin, she won the Wassaja Award — the highest honor given by the Native American Journalists Association — for her two-year coverage of an Indian gaming controversy. Michel is also co-owner of the twice-monthly paper, News From Indian Country.**



to cover financial mismanagement involving Navajo Nation president Albert Hale. ■ In October 1997 a reporter for the weekly *Native American Press/Ojibwe News* (circ.: 10,000) in Minnesota was arrested by tribal police for trespassing while covering a meeting about a controversial land sale among Minnesota Chippewa tribes.

Mounting frustration prompted the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) — a group of 770 members in the U.S. and Canada — to declare 1998 "The Year of Promoting Free Expression in Native America." By focusing on free press issues, NAJA hopes to educate mainstream North America about the tough jobs tribal journalists face, and search for solutions. Says NAJA past president Paul DeMain, editor and co-owner of *News From Indian Country*, a twice-monthly privately-owned newspaper published in Hayward, Wisconsin (circ.: 8,000): "It's very traumatic because people tend to lose their jobs for reporting things that tribal leaders would rather not see in print."

A tribal journalist's job is most precarious in times of tribal political strife. DeMain learned that lesson twenty years ago as editor of the Lac Courte Oreilles Chippewa tribe's *LCO Journal*. He refused to let the tribal chairman review the paper's copy before it was printed, and was threatened with firing. Fortunately for DeMain, a majority on the tribal council supported him. But his brush with prior restraint moved him a decade later to buy the *LCO Journal* and turn it into an independent paper.

That's a rare feat since most reservations are located in remote, depressed areas with few advertising dollars to support a paper. In a collection of essays by Native American journalists published by the Freedom Forum, titled "From the Front Lines: Free Press Struggles in Native America," DeMain writes that a free press on Indian lands is still a remote dream: "Many tribal leaders still are threatened by the tribal press, and continue placing restrictions on what can be printed."

The stories they attempt to muzzle share recurrent themes: political battles within tribal governments; power struggles among factions vying for control of a reservation; conflicts that in extreme cases erupt into violence and armed takeovers of tribal buildings. Tribal offi-



**TOM ARVISO, JR.:** left, editor of the *Navajo Times*, drew fire from the tribe's former president. **in the Times newsroom two staffers at work:** Deenise Becenti (left) and Marley Shebala.

cials inexperienced with dealing with the news media are not likely to cooperate with reporters and editors, and are quick to censor stories that they perceive as negative.

Jeff Armstrong, a non-Indian reporter for the privately owned *Native American Press/Ojibwe News* in Bemidji, Minnesota, discovered that even non-tribal papers face difficulty reporting tribal politics. He was arrested by tribal police last October, while attempting to cover a meeting of the Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians. He

is fighting a trespassing charge brought against him after the Mille Lacs Tribal Executive Committee ordered him to leave the meeting because he was not a tribal member. Armstrong (whose beat includes seven Minnesota reservations) says he had previously covered four of five public meetings the committee held to discuss a controversial offer by the U.S. Justice Department to settle tribal claims to more than 800,000 acres of reservation lands. Many tribal members strongly opposed the offer. In a lawsuit filed in U.S.



**PAUL DeMAIN**, editor and co-owner of *News From Indian Country*, believes that a free press on Indian lands is a remote dream because tribal leaders feel threatened by journalists.

## FIRST AMENDMENT

District Court against county and tribal law enforcement officials, Armstrong says the committee "intended to restrict the press from reporting on the meeting specifically to harass and obstruct Petitioner from carrying out his duties as a reporter in order to further their efforts to subvert the will of the people."

Native American rights advocate

### Tribal leaders expect the Native press to report only positive news about what's happening on the reservation

Suzan Shown Harjo, president of the Morning Star Institute in Washington, D.C., says that Indian journalists' problems have their roots in the days when tribes lived in camps and got their news from a "village crier," a designated tribal member who shouted the news throughout the community. "If the village crier reported on something wrong within tribe, he was replaced or punished, or sometimes killed. That's literally killing the messenger."

Dan Agent, former editor of the *Cherokee Advocate* (he was simultaneously public affairs director for the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma), insists that his principal allegiance was to the Cherokee people when he reported on a political crisis within the tribe last year. For his efforts, Agent believes, he was fired. He found it hard "to give a balanced view to tribal members" when he disagreed morally and ethically with how Principal Chief Joe Byrd was running the Cherokee government. In the six months before his dismissal, the *Advocate* covered a federal investigation into possible corruption in Byrd's administration, and Byrd's re-interpretation of the tribal constitution that resulted in his supporters having a majority on the Cherokee tribal council.

Agent's successor is Lynn Adair, a former local daily newspaper reporter

who is also Byrd's spokesperson. In spite of all the controversy on the reservation, she says, "there is other news that needs to be covered. Good news." She hasn't covered much of the constitutional controversy afflicting the tribe. Her reason: the paper is a bimonthly. "It would be old news by then."

Like the Cherokees, the Navajo Nation — located in Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico — expects its newspaper to show the tribe in a favorable light. Before he resigned in February, Navajo Nation president Albert Hale said the *Navajo Times* had blown his marital and financial problems out of proportion. The *Times* had broken a story in 1995 about Hale's alleged affair with his female press secretary, and covered his subsequent bitter divorce. Early this year, a special prosecutor appointed by the Navajo legislature completed a year-long investigation of Hale's financial practices and found he had violated the tribe's ethics code. The tribe agreed to forego pursuing charges against him in return for his resignation.

When I interviewed him in 1997, Hale said that *Navajo Times* editor Tom Arviso, Jr. "doesn't seem to understand that this is a Navajo-owned paper. He thinks he has independence to publish whatever he wants." He criticized the *Times* for consistently ignoring press releases from his office and down-playing news that Hale considered important. Instead, he said, the paper focused on negativity, rumor, and innuendo, and

often failed to quote him in stories about the scandal — a claim that *Times* staff members say is due to Hale's failure to return their calls.

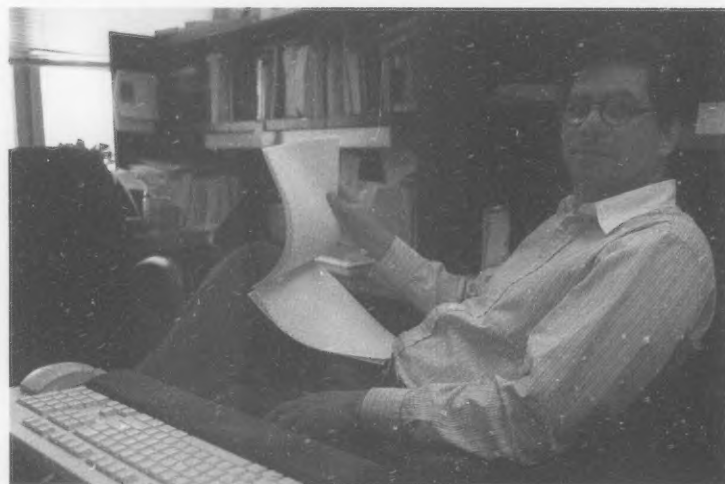
Arviso sees Albert Hale's resignation as final proof that the paper's coverage was accurate and thorough. As for lessons learned, he says, "You don't know just how far you can go until you try."

And Marley Shebala, the reporter who broke the story about Hale's alleged infidelity, is gratified that: "People have stopped me and told me they were grateful that the *Navajo Times* continued its coverage even after we were threatened with firing by the tribal administration."

For Sharon Tom, former editor of *Au-Authm Action News* published by the Salt River Pima-Maricopa tribe near Scottsdale, Arizona, the pressure was too great. "I think tribal journalists have a very tough job," says Tom, who quit after three years. "There's no separation of powers between the tribal government and the press. With tribal media, it's one and the same."

Tom covered two recall elections against the Salt River Pima-Maricopa tribal president, and some controversial issues involving gambling operations and a landfill proposal. Tribal leaders, she says, often tried to steer her into covering soft feature stories instead. "They never really took the newspaper seriously. They felt it should be a public relations tool."

**MARK TRAHANT, formerly the publisher of the *Navajo Times*, is a *Seattle Times* columnist. He believes that "the challenges to any editor of a tribal paper are almost insurmountable."**



JAN LOTT/THE SEATTLE TIMES



# A NATIVE PRESS PRIMER

The United States today has 557 federally recognized Indian tribes residing on about 100 million acres of land. The national Indian population is just under two million, with about half residing on Indian reservations.



LaCourse

Across the nation, there are approximately 280 reservation newspapers and bulletins, 320 urban Indian publications, about 100 magazines, thirty radio stations, and one television station.

Between 1852 and 1980, sixty-four American Indian tribes adopted written constitutions containing specific provisions for a free press within their sovereign reservation boundaries. Declaration of a free press was a direct exercise of the legal powers of tribal governments in behalf of their citizenry.

The first such guarantees emerged among the Choctaw peoples in 1852. The Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation, printed that year at Doaksville, Oklahoma Indian Territory, contained the following provisions: "That the printing press shall be free to every person, and no law shall ever be made to restrain the rights thereof. The free communication of opinions is one of the inviolable rights of man, and every citizen may freely speak, write and print on any subject, being responsible for the abuse of that liberty."

Experts in the field of Indian law have concluded that freedom of the press on all Indian trust lands really began with passage of the Indian Civil Rights Act on April 11, 1968. That law extended certain Constitutional rights to Indian peoples living under tribal governments — including the guarantee of freedom of the press. Title II of the Act declares: "No Indian tribe in exercising powers of self-government shall make or enforce any law prohibiting the free exercise of religion, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition for a redress of grievances . . . ."

Court decisions followed in the wake of the Act. On May 15, 1978, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Santa Clara Pueblo v. Martinez* that cases brought under the Indian Civil Rights Act must be heard in tribal courts. Since that decision, hearings on alleged civil rights

violations within the reservations — including violation of the right to a free press, prior restraint, and constraint of information — are conducted by tribal courts and their appellate courts. A principal concern of Indian journalists is the independence of these courts from external political influences.

Among the free-press problems encountered by tribal newspapers and Indian news staffs are: politically-motivated firings of journalists before or after tribal elections; political cutoff or selective reduction of publications' funds; prior censorship by reservation officials; the forced hiring of unqualified editors and reporters by reason of blood kinships or political loyalties; firings growing out of published news stories and editorials; the banning of journalists from tribal government meetings; restricting press access to tribal government documents; and even occasional death threats over published stories, or articles scheduled for publication.

Two principal means for the defense of free press on reservation lands are:

■ **Legal Counsel:** Each reservation paper should routinely have the services of a lawyer, usually from the principal law firm serving the tribe under contract, for review of controversial copy, related contracts, and occasionally personnel matters. If an attorney or legal firm denies it has contractual responsibilities toward reservation media, then new attorney contracts should be amended to include these responsibilities. Or a separate appropriation could be put in place on behalf of the reservation media to meet this continuing need.

■ **NAJA Legal Office:** What about reservation papers that can't fill their legal assistance void for any reason? The Native American Journalists Association adopted a resolution establishing a legal office to assist these tribal media and their local counsel will soon be available to all Indian media.

Many more cases regarding free press issues are certain to be filed in tribal courts, and will produce the first generation of significant case law involving press freedoms across Indian country at the start of the new century. — Richard LaCourse

*Richard LaCourse, associate editor of the Yakama Nation Review in Toppenish, Washington, is a member of the Yakama Nation of Washington state.*

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Fellows who complete this course of study earn a Master of Studies in Law (MSL) degree.

The fellowship includes a \$25,000 stipend for living expenses provided through the generous support of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Yale Law School provides a grant that covers tuition and fees to fellows who return to journalism following completion of the program. Together, these make up a generous package of financial support for the nine-month program that amounts to over \$50,000.

Applications for the 1999–2000 academic year are due January 4, 1999. For further information, write to MSL/Journalism Program, Yale Law School, Box 208215, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-8215, or call 203 432-1696. Our email address is [gradpro.law@yale.edu](mailto:gradpro.law@yale.edu); our website is [www.law.yale.edu](http://www.law.yale.edu).

### The Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism

The Mental Health Program of The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, announces one-year journalism fellowships. Designed to enhance public understanding of mental health issues and combat stigma and discrimination against people with mental illness, the fellowships begin in September 1999.

- The program is open to print and broadcast journalists with a minimum of two years of professional experience.
- Each fellow will be awarded a \$10,000 grant and two expense-paid trips to The Carter Center to meet with program staff and advisors.
- Projects will be tailored to the experience and interests of the fellows, who will consult with the program's distinguished advisory board.
- Fellows will not be required to leave their current employment.

*"This program is an exciting component of our efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination against those with mental illness. I look forward to working with each of our fellows to promote awareness of these important issues."*

—Rosalynn Carter

**The 1999 application deadline is May 3.** To apply, write or e-mail:

THE  
CARTER CENTER



John Gates, Ph.D., Director  
The Carter Center Mental Health Program  
One Copenhill  
453 Freedom Parkway  
Atlanta, Georgia 30307  
[ccmhp@emory.edu](mailto:ccmhp@emory.edu)

## FIRST AMENDMENT

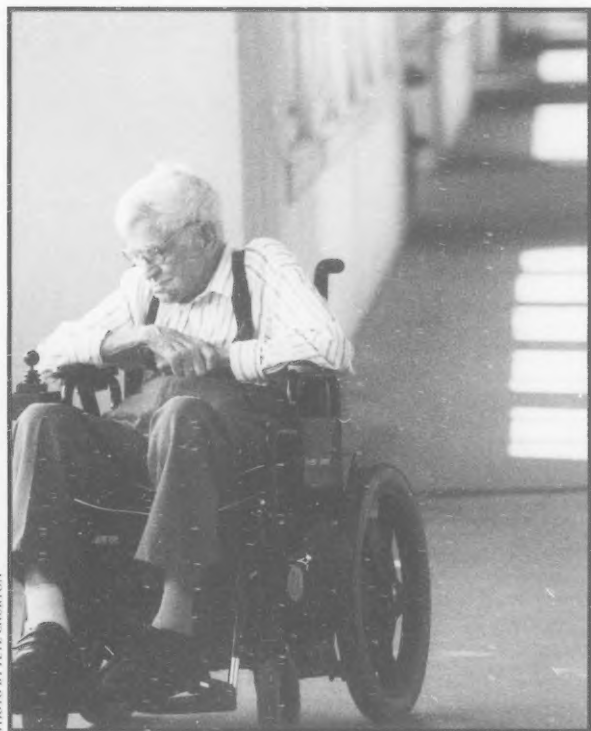
That's the reality of tribal media, says Tim Giago, publisher of *Indian Country Today*, his own weekly newspaper in Rapid City, South Dakota. "Tribal leaders want only good things printed." Giago, who was the first president of NAJA, says years of poor coverage of Indian tribes by mainstream media contribute to tribal leaders' mistrust of all media — even their own. He contends that his reporters can ask tough questions without repercussions because his paper is independent. "For tribal journalists, it comes down to who is paying their salaries," says Giago. "If I were working for a magazine owned by General Motors and I started uncovering something negative about GM, do you think I would have a job?"

Tribal governments are composed of elected officials accountable to their people. But, says Giago, tribal governments have "absolute power" over their people's lives. They determine who gets which jobs, and who benefits from the tribe's social programs that are funded through federal grants and the tribe's own revenue. "To change this will require leadership that believes in freedom of the press."

NAJA leaders say that's why they adopted a "free-press plan" that includes engaging tribal leaders in dialogue with tribal media in the effort to reach some common ground. At their annual conference in Tempe, Arizona, in June, NAJA members voted to establish a hotline for members seeking legal advice — a project the NAJA staff will pursue in the next year.

**R**esolving these free-press issues is crucial to the good health of any tribal community, says Mark Trahant, a columnist at the *Seattle Times* and former editor and publisher of the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News* in Moscow, Idaho. "The challenges to any editor of a tribal paper are almost insurmountable," he insists. Trahant was publisher of the *Navajo Times* in 1987 when Peter MacDonald shut it down and fired the staff. MacDonald is now in federal prison for conspiracy and taking kickbacks from off-reservation businesses while he was Navajo Nation president in the 1980s. (The *Times* resumed publication later that year.) Struggling to win the same press freedoms that newspapers elsewhere across America enjoy, Trahant declares, "is a battle worth fighting." ■

# THE PATIENTS AT CARVILLE WERE FORGOTTEN BY ALMOST



EVERYONE,  
UNTIL THE  
BEAUMONT  
ENTERPRISE  
TOLD THEIR  
STORY.

PHOTO BY PETE CHURTON



There were 120 patients about to lose the closest thing they had to home. As residents of the only remaining leper colony in the continental U.S., many felt their world had ended when the federal government announced the plan to convert the 300-acre site in Carville, Louisiana, into an academy for troubled youths. Reporter Adam Welsh and photographer Pete Churton brought everything into perspective for readers of The Beaumont Enterprise with an in-depth, well-balanced cover story. Welsh examined the irrevocable choices the patients would have to make about their futures. He weighed the practical considerations of the government needing to reduce a \$17 million program that benefited such a small, aging patient population. It was unforgettable coverage of all-but-forgotten people. "The End of Their World" was just one more way Hearst Newspapers enrich readers' lives every day.

Read the entire story online at [www.beaumontenterprise.com](http://www.beaumontenterprise.com)

# THE RISE AND RISE OF

BY DAVID LIEBERMAN

**"A** whole new genre of local news." That's what Philip Balboni calls his young, twenty-four-hour regional news service and a host of fledgling cable channels like it. These electronic versions of local newspapers aim to be "the highest quality source of news on television," says Balboni, who — as president of Boston-based New England Cable News and chairman of the Association of Regional News Channels — is a pioneer in a journalistic movement that's burgeoning across the country. He's convinced that, for once, good TV journalism is good business. "There's a strong appetite for quality local news."

Many cable operators agree. Companies serving nearly every major market are rushing to create local and regional all-news channels. Nearly thirty of these services reach about 23 million subscribers in or around cities such as New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco — and regions including New England, the Pacific Northwest, and Southern California's Orange County. Most are less than five years old. More are on the way. In January, A.H. Belo will introduce a statewide service for Texas. It may face a showdown with Time Warner, which recently announced plans to create a regional news channel at the company's cable systems in Austin. And cable giant Tele-Communications Inc. is considering a possible service for Denver.

The low-budget channels eschew helicopters, fancy weather radars, and expensive remote trucks, and usually lay off the happy talk and celebrity gossip. They devote plenty of time instead to breaking news, weather, traffic, and sports, and leisurely reports about local politics, education, transportation, and the environment.

Different agendas are at work here.

*David Lieberman is a media reporter and columnist for USA Today.*

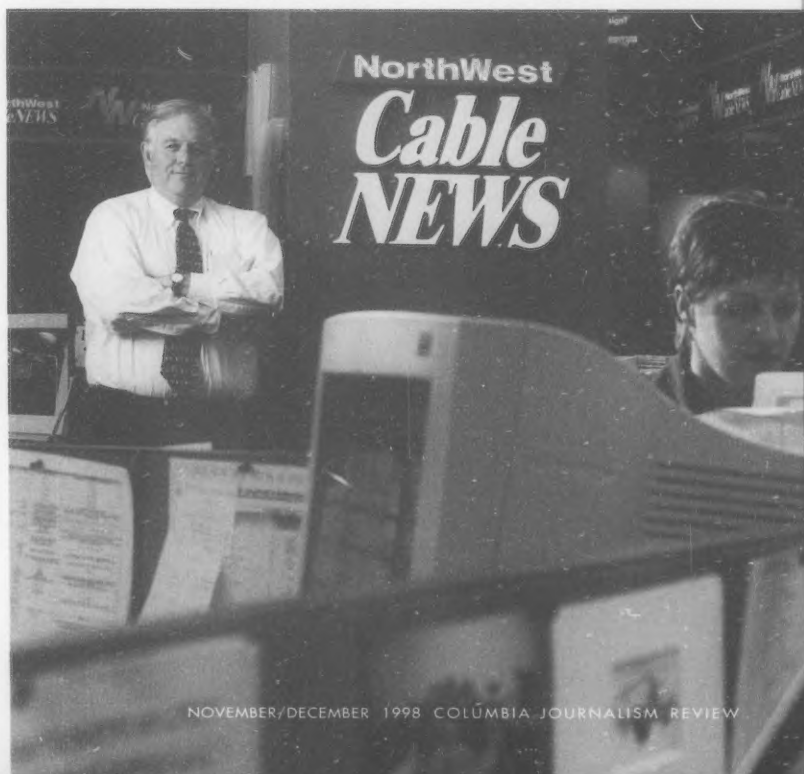
Some cable news channels, such as Time Warner's New York 1, go after local newspaper and TV ad dollars. Others, like A.H. Belo's Seattle-based NorthWest Cable News Channel, supplement and promote the company's newspapers and TV stations, generating additional revenues and burnishing the companies' images as specialists in community news.

TV stations and newspapers — though their audiences are usually bigger — are beginning to feel the cable channels' hot breath on their necks. The old-line news outlets can no longer blithely assume they'll be the first to report what's happening in their hometowns. Regional cable news has "opened everybody's eyes to the fact that local news can be done around the clock," says Eric Braun, a consultant with Frank N. Magid Associates, Inc. The twenty-four-hour availability appeals particularly to young adults juggling kids and careers, and to commuters who often can't carve out the time to watch a station's evening newscast.

Viewership runs highest on weekdays before 9 A.M., in prime time, and on weekends before noon. Ratings predictably rise dramatically when there's eventful local news. Florida residents tuned in to Time Warner's channels when massive brush fires spread through parts of the state in July. Viewers are grateful for news having some genuine relevance to their lives — and for an alternative to the grief and gore that dominate many local station newscasts.

Big-city TV stations often reach hundreds of towns, and lack the time, resources, and inclination to cover any one of them in depth. As a result, many newscasts are heavy on crime, a subject that's relatively easy to report, and that grabs viewers who live far from the scene. (Violent stories filled an average of 40 percent of the time devoted to news in the latest annual survey of local broadcasts in fifty-two major markets, conducted by Rocky Mountain Media Watch. New England Cable News was

President and general manager Craig Marrs in the Seattle studio of NorthWest Cable News Channel





# 24-HOUR LOCAL NEWS

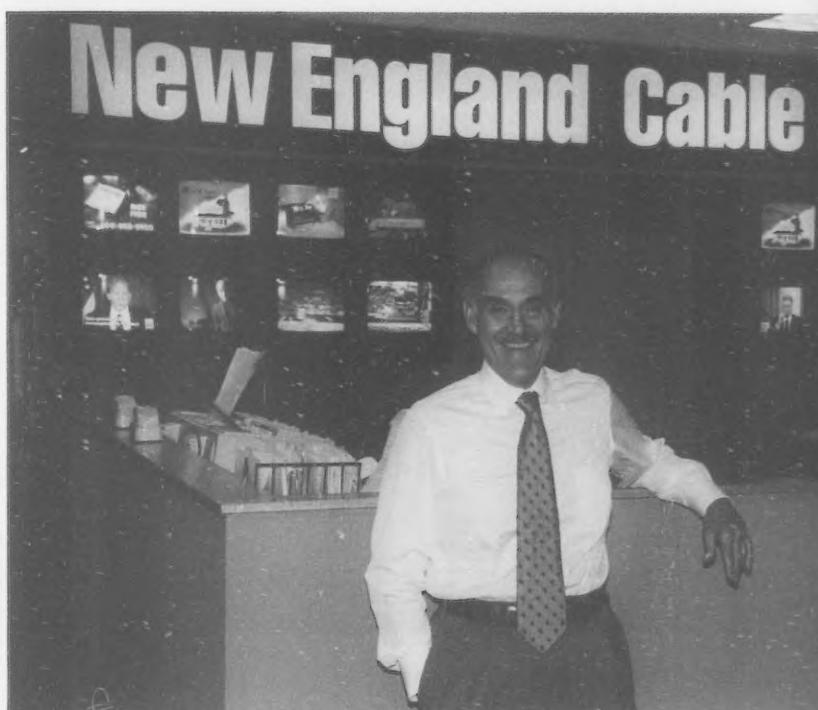
one of four local newscasters praised by the group "for presenting quality programs that provide empowering information to viewers.")

**R**egional news cable channels attract surprisingly large audiences by taking the high road. At least they are large by the standards of the cable world, where niche-oriented services usually thrive on a fraction of a ratings point. For example, New York 1 gets better ratings locally than CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News Channel, says Time Warner president Richard Parsons. "It's simple human nature. People want to know what their neighbors are up to. People want to know what's going on in their block. People want to know information that touches their lives."

The hard-charging cablers often cause TV stations to cover events they otherwise might not. New England Cable News, for example (co-owned by Hearst and cable operator MediaOne), shook the Boston market when it began gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Louise Woodward nanny trial. "When some of the local stations saw the ratings, they started covering the trial live," says Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio-Television News Directors Association.

Executives at the cable channels also say they notice changes in the way some TV stations deploy their troops. "We sometimes joked that [local stations] wouldn't go into the suburbs unless several people were tragically killed," says Wayne Lynch, vice president of news and programming at Washington, D.C.'s Newschannel 8. "Now we see them covering the suburbs more." And, according to one TV station executive, the obverse is true. "If an atom bomb went off in Hoboken," he jests, "New York 1 wouldn't cover it until the lethal cloud drifted over Manhattan."

Leading the regional news charge are multimedia powers such as Cablevision Systems, Time Warner, Tribune, and Belo. Cablevision Systems' News 12 Group created the nation's first local news channel on Long Island in 1986. It's



Philip Balboni, president of New England Cable News, predicts "a strong appetite for quality local news."

a big hit with the Island's affluent suburban audiences that often are neglected by New York City stations whose signals sprawl over three states. The original channel has spawned separate, complementary services covering Southwestern Connecticut, New Jersey, Westchester County, and the Bronx.

Those channels stand cheek by jowl with Time Warner, which created the Manhattan-based New York 1 in 1992. Time Warner also built news channels for its systems in Rochester, Tampa, and Orlando. Although the company likes to run its own channels, Time Warner teamed up with Tribune Company's *Orlando Sentinel* at Central Florida News. Tribune, for its part, solidified its hold on the Windy City by creating CLTV (ChicagoLand Television) News, which has cameras in the newsroom of the *Chicago Tribune*.

Belo is the most aggressive about

using all-news channels as a form of corporate synergy. Its New Orleans-based Newswatch 15, a partnership with Cox's cable system, generates an estimated \$500,000 in cash flow simply by rebroadcasting news programming from Belo's local CBS affiliate, WWL. The company's NorthWest Cable News Channel uses resources from Belo's TV stations in Seattle, Portland, and Spokane. And its new Texas Cable News draws on Belo's TV stations in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, and newspapers in Dallas and Bryan-College Station.

**W**ill Belo's cable channel cannibalize viewing of its existing TV stations? Analyst Paul Sweeney of Salomon Smith Barney doesn't think so. Rather, it will enhance and promote Belo's over-the-air stations and brand identity, he believes. Like NorthWest Cable News, management esti-

## TELEVISION

mates that the new Texas channel will be break-even in four to five years.

But cable news channels needn't be part of a giant media company to prosper. TV station owner Joe Albritton created a respected cable news service in Washington, D.C., Newschannel 8, to complement his ABC affiliate, WJLA. The service also helps the network in this market of influential people who often don't make it home in time to catch the evening news: It's the only non-ABC outlet that has the network's blessing to rebroadcast *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* and *Nightline*.

Federal law has helped broadcasters like Albritton to create news outlets on cable. Lawmakers gave TV station owners the right to demand payments from systems that retransmit their local broadcast signals. Cable operators who didn't want to pay cash accepted a compromise: they made room on the cable dial for regional news channels.

While the services attract strong ratings in the cable universe, few are popular enough yet to pose a major threat to TV stations' newscasts. Their business plan, says Eric Braun, is built on their cumulative audience over the

course of a week. "People dip in and dip out."

Viewers almost have to. Even slickly produced cable news programming can become monotonous over long stretches – and few can brag about their pizzazz.

Styles vary, but a typical rundown consists of a half-hour newscast that's repeated and updated throughout the day. Production values are sometimes primitive with little more than an anchor, over-the-shoulder graphics, and a string of hastily edited video reports from the field. Channels also fill lots of airtime with panel discussions, call-in shows, and live coverage of city council meetings, planning board sessions, and state legislature activities.

Some channels are starting to flex their journalistic muscles by freeing reporters to handle major investigations. News 12 has dug into allegations of HMO overcharging at its Long Island station, and examined the safety, health, and cleanliness of the region's sea shores. New England Cable News won a Peabody Award this year for a documentary that examined hospice care through the experience of a woman dying of breast cancer. But costly labor-intensive

reporting is the exception because most of the channels are still short of funds. They make ends meet by closely monitoring operating expenses. Yearly budgets often run less than \$10 million. By contrast, top-rated TV stations in major markets, such as New York and Los Angeles, spend as much as \$35 million a year to produce five hours of daily news. They pinch pennies by staffing up with young journalists willing to accept low pay for the opportunity to build a reputation in a major market. Reporter and producer salaries range from \$26,000 to \$45,000. Anchors do better, earning between \$35,000 and \$70,000.

Asked to assess the quality of the journalism the channels produce, Braun says, "how do you assess the quality of triple-A baseball? You're looking at rising talent who need a few more years to cut their teeth before they go to the big time." Broadcasters eagerly pounce on regional news channel journalists when they're ready for bigger salaries and a higher profile. "It's a good training ground," says WCBS station manager Steve Friedman, former boss of *The Today Show*. "In the old days the O&Os provided the talent for the future. Then

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KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

came cable news — a lot of people started at CNN. But when you work at a big station, you want people who already know the local market."

The young journalists are versatile. They have to be. Many channels use electronic gear that requires street reporters to juggle several chores. Lightweight High-8 video cameras played a key role in helping news channels get started in the early 1990s: a single reporter can cover a story without additional crew members to lug a separate tape machine and microphone. Some services have writers who report from the scene and editors who shoot. One channel promoted a photographer to associate producer.

**T**he challenge now is to lower expenses even more, so that news channels can operate economically in communities where cable systems have fewer than 500,000 subscribers. "We believe there's a way to do it in cable systems having only 300,000 subscribers, or perhaps even less," says Time Warner Cable's senior vice president for newsgathering, John Newton. "It depends on how competitive you

want to be and whether you operate twenty-four hours a day. But the biggest factor is technology."

That's why many executives are watching Cablevision Systems' efforts to incorporate cutting edge gadgetry at the News 12 Group. The company installed a digital system at its new channel in the Bronx that needs just one person to run the control room. That staffer clicks commands into a computer pre-programmed to cue up digitized videos, insert graphics, and control robotic cameras. Now the company has completed a plan to let field reporters feed video back to the control room simply by plugging a lightweight piece of equipment directly into the parent cable system. "That would give us additional live capacity at very low cost," says Fein. "We don't need a microwave truck."

And now suddenly, here comes the digital age. Every TV station in the country has been handed more spectrum space to let them make the transition from the old-fangled analog style transmission. Those digital channels will enable broadcasters to beam out five or six program services in the bandwidth that now accommodates just one.

Some TV people are toying with the idea of creating local, all-news channels — just like the cable guys have done. Otherwise, cable news outlets now up and running could easily migrate over to those slots. Eric Braun thinks that local TV stations are, in fact, considering utilizing some of that invaluable new bandwidth to reach viewers who don't subscribe to cable.

Other cablers are hoping to snag people who prefer getting their local news on the Internet. New England Cable News's site, for example, offers a primitive form of video news-on-demand. Users click on selected stories, and see a herky-jerky version of the TV report on their personal computers. The video on PCs will improve, and cable operators will encourage other convergence efforts, as their systems begin to offer subscribers Internet service via cable modems. These devices connect cable wires to PCs, and transmit data as much as 100 times faster than today's conventional telephone modems.

"There's great promise here," says Balboni. "The challenge is to make local cable news excellent, and to bring TV news to a higher level." ■



**Since 1955, The Sidney Hillman Foundation has presented annual awards to journalists, writers, and public figures whose pursuit of their craft serves social justice and the common good. We are pleased to announce the 1997 winners:**

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BY JOHN HENRY

**W**arren Buffett of Omaha is a champion investor, of course, but America's second-richest man is also a press lord. The Berkshire Hathaway holding company, which he controls, owns 17 percent of The Washington Post Company (where he is a director), and is the tenth-largest shareholder in Gannett. In the 1980s, Buffett offered to raise his stake in Time Inc. to more than 10 percent, although the board declined the offer. He was the largest shareholder in Capital Cities/ABC, Inc., until it was swallowed by Walt Disney, and he became the largest investor in that company. He even provided \$82,000 to the liberal *Washington Monthly* in its early days. His longtime friend, Carol J. Loomis, a member of the board of editors at *Fortune*, once wrote of Buffett, "He says that if he had not been an investor, he might well have picked journalism."

The one journalistic outlet that publicly traded Berkshire Hathaway owns outright is *The Buffalo News* in upstate New York. What does this quarter-million-circulation daily tell us about Buffett's notion of the journalism business?

In many ways, the *News* is an awesome success. *Editor & Publisher* says it has the highest profit margin of the nation's publicly owned newspapers; better than 35 cents of each dollar the paper took in last year turned into pretax profit. Buffett paid \$32.5 million for what was *The Buffalo Evening News* in 1977 (nearly \$88 million in 1998 dollars). Last year it earned a record \$55.4 million before taxes, up from \$49.8 million in 1996.

What makes these profits especially impressive is that they are generated in an economically troubled Rust Belt city, its once-vibrant port in decline, its once-mighty steel industry decimated. Of course, the *News* hasn't been immune to the problems of upstate New York. Publisher Stanford Lipsey cites the Buffalo area's population drop — 2.1 percent between 1990 and 1997 — as one of the

*John Henry, a former Buffalo resident, is deputy editor of 116th & Broadway, the newsletter of Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.*

# BUFFETT in BUFFALO

reasons for declining circulation. The daily has lost ground for four years, down to 252,705 from a peak of 320,372 in 1983, and the Sunday edition has been slipping for six, to 338,467 from 383,017 in 1992.

Even so, the *News's* penetration — a remarkable 64 percent of Buffalo-area households, and an even more impressive 80 percent on Sundays — remains number one in the top fifty U.S. markets.

Yet journalistically, Buffett gets a B in Buffalo. This is doubly disap-

pointing to many in that city of 310,000 who hoped that Buffett wanted editorial excellence, too. As Buffett wrote shortly after he bought the paper, "I want to achieve business success in newspapers, but will be unhappy unless it is accompanied by journalistic success."

The *News*, while respected and read, has failed to fulfill the expectations of those who hoped Mr. Deep Pockets would transform it into a role model. James

Heaney, one of the *News's* education reporters, echoes people inside and outside the newsroom when he says: "This is a decent but underachieving newspaper. Given our profitability and penetration rate, we could and should be one of the great regional newspapers in the country."

The key to the *News's* extraordinary profitability was a move Buffett made seven months after buying it. He launched a Sunday edition, dealing what proved to be a mortal blow to its weak morning rival, the *Buffalo Courier-Express*, which had previously had the lucrative Sunday market to itself. In less than six years the *Courier* was out of business and the *News* had become an all-day operation, dropping the word *Evening* from its title. The *News*, which lost millions during its struggle with the *Courier*, was now poised to reap the benefits of being the only game in town. Reap them it did, relentlessly raising cir-





# *His Paper Prints Money. What Else Does It Print?*

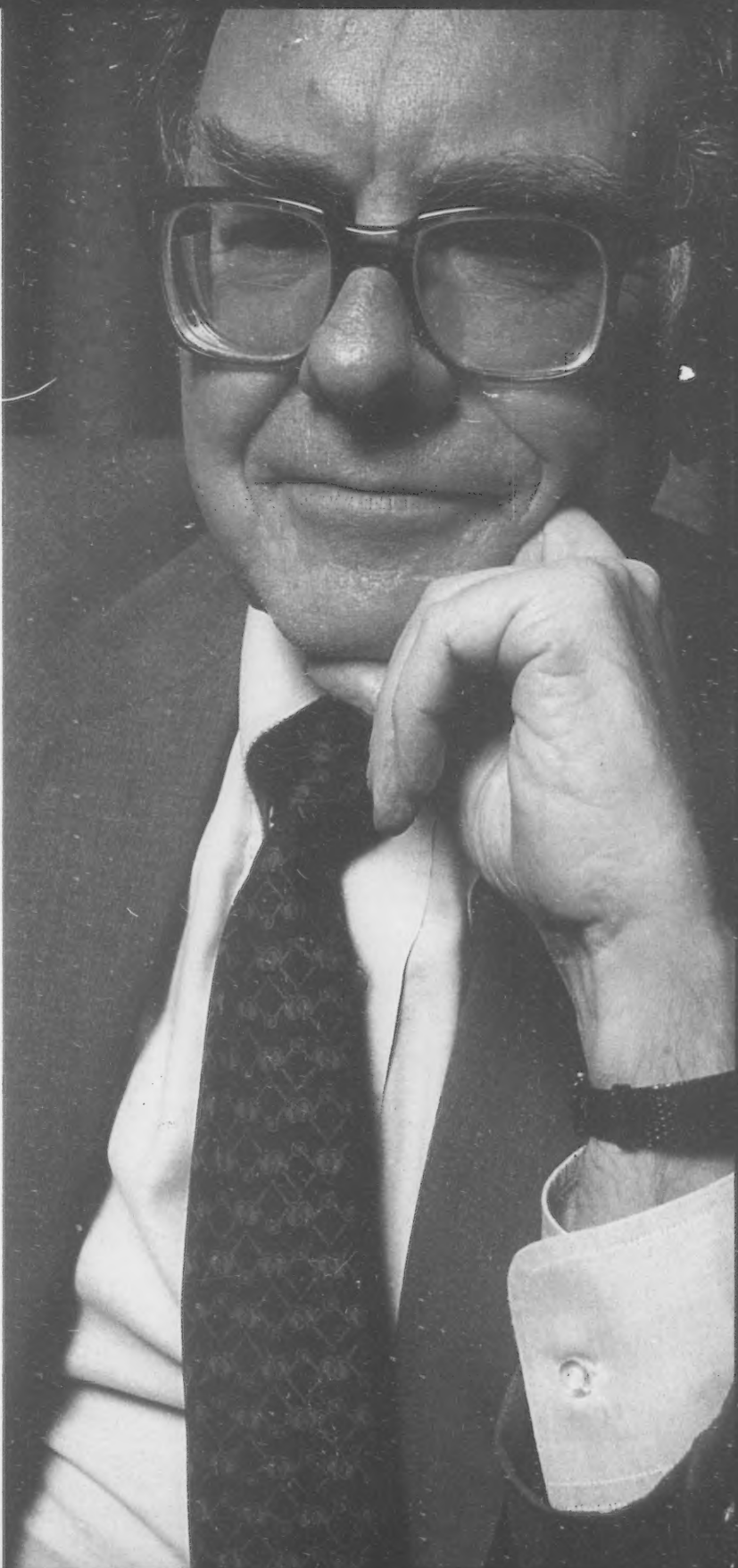
culuation and advertising rates, while keeping an exceptionally tight lid on costs.

The *News* could raise rates and make them stick because of the reader loyalty that had developed under its previous owner, the aristocratic Butler family. The paper Buffett bought from them was sober, solid, and known for its strong coverage of western New York.

**B**uffett, 68, whose net worth *Forbes* estimated last year to be \$21 billion, is a famously hands-off owner of the companies that Berkshire Hathaway has bought — a disparate group that ranges from Dairy Queen to World Book encyclopedias to GEICO, the auto insurer. In the case of the *News*, Buffett installed as publisher his friend Lipsey, who had been publisher of a group of Omaha weeklies that Buffett owned for a while.

On the editorial side, Buffett named Murray B. Light, now 72, a *News* employee since 1949, as editor. "In his first meeting with me," Light says, "he told me he would not interfere with newsroom operations. He never has."

Yet a couple of the owner's fingerprints are discernible. Buffett, son of a Republican congressman from Nebraska, moved early on to have the paper abandon its tradition of endorsing only Republicans, telling his new editor, "Let's be truly independent." Under Buffett's ownership the *News* has endorsed only Democratic presidential candidates. (Light, who oversees the editorial page as well as news sections, says that Buffett is not involved in the endorsement process, though he is notified before publication. Buffett, who



talks infrequently with reporters, declined to be interviewed.)

The second area on which Buffett has left his stamp is the size of the paper's news hole, which in the first six months of 1998 represented nearly 60 percent of the total content — extraordinarily high. While the Butlers had followed the industry standard of 40 percent news and 60 percent advertising, Buffett insisted on a news hole of at least

## "Given our profitability, we should be one of the great regional newspapers."

50 percent. He sees this as a business decision: a large and intelligently utilized news hole, he wrote in his 1989 letter to Berkshire shareholders, "attracts a wide spectrum of readers and thereby boosts penetration. High penetration, in turn, makes a newspaper particularly valuable to retailers since it allows them to talk to the entire community through a single megaphone."

"You could do a helluva lot worse than Warren Buffett for an owner," says Barbara Ireland, who was the *News's* editorial page editor until she left this year to join *The New York Times*. Before she landed the editorial-page job, in 1989, Ireland says Buffett interviewed her for two and a half hours. "He definitely was not the standard business conservative," she recalls. "I saw a humane attitude on social issues. He had two major issues: world population control and nuclear weapons control." But "because he doesn't impose his politics, most people don't even know what they are."

**U**nder Lipsey and Light, the *News* became strikingly different from the paper Buffett bought. The most obvious change is the front page, where the focus has become relentlessly local. At one time it took "a very big local story to get on page one," says Gerald I. Goldberg, the *News's* editorial page editor. "Now, it takes a good national story to break onto page one."

An op-ed page was added in 1981, and business and sports coverage has expanded. Local society news, a staple of the more class-conscious Butler era, has given way to meatier lifestyle features and cultural and entertainment news.

The staff is laced with talent. Cartoonist Tom Toles won a Pulitzer in 1990; Heaney, the education reporter,

was a Pulitzer finalist in 1993; Kevin Colison, a transportation reporter, won a George Polk Award in 1996; and Jerry Sullivan, a sportswriter, was voted one of the top ten U.S. sports columnists by Associated Press sports editors in 1996. Two years ago, the *News* won eight New York State Associated Press writing awards — more than any of the New York City dailies or *Newsday*.

And people tend to stay at the *News*.

One reason is good benefits. Pay scales are competitive, too; the top Guild minimum after five years at the *News* is \$963 a week, fifteenth among U.S. dailies. Still, Philip Fairbanks, vice president of the Buffalo Newspaper Guild and the *News's* city hall reporter, says his members "were more than a little disappointed" by the most recent contract, negotiated last fall, which provides a 2.5 percent annual increase over six years. "There's not a lot of correlation between the paper's profitability and wage increases," he says.

What does the staff produce? "Get an upstate paper on the same day in Rochester, Syracuse, or Albany. *The Buffalo News* is head and shoulders above them," says a former *News* reporter. Yet as the paper for New York state's second-largest city, it *ought* to outshine smaller upstate dailies. And some prominent readers remain constantly disappointed.

For example, Catherine Schweitzer, executive director of a local charitable foundation, notes that Toronto, Canada's financial capital, is less than two hours from Buffalo and that the city's future is tied to Canada's. "Yet," she says, "there is almost no business news from there except for the value of the American dollar against the Canadian dollar." And, she says, the paper fails to report adequately on Canadian developments in health care, education, and urban planning. Light counters that the *News*, which has stringers in Toronto and Ottawa, provides more Canadian coverage than any other U.S. paper outside of Detroit.

Mark Goldman, a leader in reviving

the performing arts in downtown Buffalo and the author of two social histories of the city, argues that, although nearly one out of every three residents of Buffalo is black, "coverage of the minority community is terrible. I don't know why any black would read that paper." Agnes Palazzetti, a *News* reporter for nearly forty years who covers welfare and human services, says that "if you look through our pages, the majority of coverage of blacks is someone in handcuffs. We'll have pictures of fifty brides, and maybe just one or two will be black." Light calls that criticism "a bunch of crap," adding, "We go out of our way to really seek out positive stories about the minority community." He also notes that the *News* prints all bridal pictures that are submitted to it, free of charge.

Still, the paper has just eight black editorial staff members out of 187. One of them, Rod Watson, a *News* editorial writer since 1987, says that shortage causes problems: "The African-American shirt-and-tie crowd hates the *News*. The lack of black staff members means that no one on the paper is making informal contacts within the black community, so that people

feel they have an in with the *News*." Watson likes Buffett's hands-off style, but he wishes Berkshire's chairman would intervene to promote hiring diversity. Light says that the paper's failure to hire — and keep — minority reporters and editors is one of the biggest disappointments of his career, and that he continually tries to do better.

After reading Katharine Graham's autobiography, Goldman says he became more disappointed with Buffett, because Graham writes at length about the extensive assistance Buffett gave her at The Washington Post Company. "I said, my God, there's no excuse for this paper," Goldman says. "Buffett knows the difference between putting out a good paper and a bad one."

Yet the book also offers a clue to one of Buffett's shortcomings. Graham describes him as "parsimonious in the extreme" and goes on to recall that when she once asked him for a dime to make a phone call, he started to walk some distance to get change for a quarter. "Warren, the



Murray B. Light



Stanford Lipsey

quarter will do," Graham remembers telling him, whereupon he sheepishly handed it over. Inside the *News*, the biggest complaint about parsimony is that, despite its profitability, the paper is woefully understaffed.

Last year, the Buffalo Newspaper Guild studied nine papers with comparable circulation and markets and found that the size of the *News's* editorial staff — 185 people at the time — was nearly a third lower than the average for the group.

**T**he most serious situation is in local news, a department that for organizational purposes includes reporters covering the city and suburbs, plus those in Washington and Albany, the state capital. Stanley L. Evans, assistant managing editor for local news, says the department has four fewer people — forty-four — than when he joined the *News* twelve years ago, because of shifts to other departments and the elimination of positions. As Evans puts it, "We're getting stretched and stretched."

Light responds: "Is it a tight staff? Yes, but that's a challenge I like. When reporters need time on a story or series, they get it." Some reporters confirm this. But along with the smaller staff, the number of Buffalo-based reporters on general assignment has dwindled. Evans says that their number has fallen from about eight to four during his time at the paper. He contends this has not reduced in-depth stories because "our best work comes off of beats."

Rose Ciotta, who was the *News's* computer-assisted-reporting editor before recently moving to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, disagrees. She says a scarcity of general-assignment people means the *News* doesn't "do enough of the in-depth reporting we used to do. It's a pure resources issue." Donn Esmonde, who writes a local-affairs column for the paper, says he often comes across information that could be developed into enterprise stories — if only the paper had reporters available to do them.

The *News* is also slow to spend on new plant and equipment. The paper was one of the last metropolitan dailies to abandon typewriters, in the mid-'80s, and it is still printed on 1956 vintage presses that are among the oldest of any major U.S. newspaper, so elderly that parts are no longer available and must be fabricated by the paper itself. Robert J. Casell, senior vice president for operations, estimates new

presses would cost \$45 million to \$55 million. "We have decided to wait until the rush of new technology slows down," he says. Meanwhile, readers get hazy pictures and inferior color reproduction.

Some employees, past and present, contend that along with investments in people and equipment the *News* needs an infusion of energy and enthusiasm. "There used to be a tendency when I worked there for the paper to suppress aggressiveness rather than reward it," says Lee Coppola, a *News* reporter from 1967 to 1983 and now dean of St. Bonaventure University's school of journalism in upstate New York. "The paper would be wary of a story that a reporter came up with until a public agency validated it. As an observer, I'd say that tendency has continued."

Light, understandably, disagrees: "I never support getting involved in a story just to win prizes," he says. "I do it to get good journalism. Do I discourage scurrilous, unbalanced reporting? You're goddam right I do. If there's legitimate news, our readers get it."

Light does concede that it is harder to maintain reportorial zeal at a monopoly paper than at one with competition. He recalls that right after the *Courier-Express* folded, he got a call from Ben Bradlee, who saw *The Washington Star* fail while he ran *The Washington Post*. Bradlee told him, "You're going to be sorry it ever went out of business."

"Ben was right," Light said. "I have vowed to do my best to keep the competitive spirit going in the newsroom. I succeeded for about two-and-a-half years, and then it kind of slowly but surely disappeared."

Buffett, who is listed on the *News* masthead as chairman, used to appear at the paper frequently, fielding questions from editorial department hands. These days a few years may pass between visits, according to Lipsey, who says the *News* doesn't require its owner's attention the way it did when it was fighting for survival against the *Courier-Express*.

Yet Buffett must be mindful of the potential threat to journalistic quality when he publishes the only newspaper in town. "Once dominant, the newspaper itself, not the marketplace, determines just how good or bad the paper will be," he told Berkshire shareholders in the company's 1984 annual report. "Good or bad, it will prosper." ■

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**Ruth Simon, Eritrea—Imprisoned Journalist**  
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Ruth Simon, under arrest and held in detention, without trial, since April 25, 1997, for doing her job as an independent journalist in reporting statements made by Eritrea's president that Eritrean troops were fighting alongside rebel forces in neighboring Sudan.

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## books

# The Brightest and the Best

by Jonathan Z. Larsen

At the peak of the Vietnam War, in the weeks surrounding Tet '68, there were more than 600 accredited journalists "in country." During the decade and a half the war lasted, thousands upon thousands of self-professed journalists trekked through. Among them were charlatans, tourists, secret agents, and stoned expatriates. Some never wrote a word or took a photograph; some never left Saigon or talked to a U.S. official below the rank of lieutenant colonel. And a depressing number served as little more than transmission belts between military briefing rooms and newspapers large and small, filling their pages with a numbing numerical soup of body counts, kill ratios, bomb sorties, and tonnages of "soft ordnance" (napalm), all couched in the antiseptic language of the military.

And then there were the exceptions, the enterprising journalists who sought out their own truth and told it in their own words, the very best of whom are represented in the pages of this remarkable two-volume anthology. *Reporting Vietnam* covers the war from the deaths of the first two American military advisers in July of 1959 ("It was a quiet evening in the sleepy little town of Bien Hoa twenty miles north of Saigon . . .") to the last airlifts from the roof of the U. S. embassy in April 1975. Wrote Keyes Beech, a Pulitzer Prize winner for his reporting in Korea:

My last view of Saigon was through the tail door of the helicopter. Tan Son Nhut was burning. So was Bien Hoa. Then the door closed — closed on the most humiliating chapter in American history.

Jonathan Z. Larsen, former editor of *New Times* and *The Village Voice*, served as *Time's* Saigon bureau chief in 1970-71.



David Halberstam (left), Malcolm W. Browne, and Neil Sheehan, Vietnam, 1963

In between, Pulitzer Prize winners and George Polk award winners spin the tale of parallel wars, the one in Indochina and the one in the United States. The reportage of the war at home would make a terrific anthology all by itself: Norman Mailer on the March on the Pentagon and the pivotal Chicago convention of '68; Tom Wolfe on Ken Kesey freaking out anti-war protesters; Michael Kinsley, then a *Harvard Crimson* reporter, reconstructing a confrontation between Henry Kissinger and his old friends on the Harvard faculty; Joe McGinniss sitting in while Nixon's team puts together an ad about his

nonexistent secret plan to end the war (Proud faces of Vietnamese peasants flash on the screen as Nixon intones, I pledge to you: we will have an honorable end to the war in Vietnam.) Perhaps the least familiar of these dispatches is the recreation of Kent State, May 1970, when the national guard killed five students, written in clinical detail by the

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redoubtable James A. Michener. But as welcome as these chapters are, they are a side dish; the meat and potatoes of this book remains the reporting from the front. There were certain shared beliefs that bound most of the journalists represented in these pages, beliefs that are more often written between the lines than boldly stated: a conviction that the war strategy, if there was one, was deeply flawed; that the

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### Bart Richards Award Announces Call for Entries

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reporting from the military command in Saigon and from the White House was equally unreliable (Michael Herr called it a "cross-fertilization of ignorance"); that the terrors inflicted on South Vietnamese civilians by indiscriminate bombing missions and heartless relocation programs negated the considerable efforts at winning the hearts and minds of the populace; that the massive U. S. bombing campaign was far less effective than the military believed, and the enemy was far more determined and resourceful; and finally that the poorly motivated and badly led South Vietnamese troops would never be a match in discipline, cunning, or ruthlessness of the North Vietnamese regulars. These were hard-won perceptions, based on months and sometimes years in the trenches, rice paddies, and refugee camps, and for their troubles, many of these reporters were rebuked and even vilified by the U. S. command in Saigon,

## It is stunning to realize just how accurate and prescient the reporters were

administration officials back in Washington, and, incredibly enough, even their own editors back home.

Reading these accounts in hindsight, with all that is now on the public record, it is stunning to realize just how accurate and prescient the best and brightest reporters were — to use David Halberstam's own phrase but without the irony. For all the false data and the denials by officials up and down the line, there was no part of the war that they did not correctly divine through their own sweat, observation, and intuition. In his recent mea culpa, *In Retrospect* (Vintage, 1995), former defense secretary Robert S. McNamara almost mimics the observations and conclusions of these accounts, many of them written more than twenty-five years and countless deaths before. Here is Michael Herr on the mission and policy itself:

For all the books and articles and white papers, all the talk and the miles of film, something wasn't answered, it wasn't even asked.

And here is Kennedy's and Johnson's defense secretary:

I clearly erred by not forcing — then or later, in either Saigon or Washington — a knock-down, drag-out debate over the loose assumptions, unasked questions, and thin analyses underlying our military strategy in Vietnam.

No reporter did a better job of explaining the inherent flaws of the military reporting system than *The New Yorker's* Jonathan Schell in this bloodless account of his airplane ride over the village of Thanh Phuoc with a forward air controller named Major Billings. A ground commander reports sniper fire, gives the relevant coordinates, and asks for an air strike.

After climbing to fifteen hundred feet again, Major Billings got into contact with the ground commander and said, "Two of those structures seem to be structures of worship. Do you want them taken out?"

"Roger," the ground commander replied.

"There seems to be a white flag out front there," Major Billings said.

"Yeah. Beats me what it means," the ground commander replied.

The churches, along with dozens of stone houses with tile roofs, are leveled. The major, in his report, lists the churches as "Permanent Military Structures" and the houses as "Military Structures."

Schell deadpans: "It is perhaps not very surprising that the Bomb Assessment Reports supplied no blanks for 'Homes Destroyed' or 'Civilians Killed.'"

Now we learn from McNamara that "none of us — not me, not the president, not Mac[McGeorge Bundy], nor Dean [Rusk], nor Max [Taylor] — was ever satisfied with the information we received from Vietnam." Also that "the increasing destruction and misery brought on the country we were supposed to be helping troubled me greatly."

It is equally stunning to learn from McNamara's book, for instance, that the most stalwart of all Vietnam apologists, and perhaps the key architect of the very worst of the military decisions, understood that the South Vietnamese troops (ARVN) were probably never going to cut the mustard. Here, in starched understatement, is General

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**The E. W. SCRIPPS SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM** and the Ohio University Department of Philosophy invite professional journalists to apply for their doctoral program in journalism ethics. Students earn a Ph.D. in mass communication, a master's degree in philosophy, and a certificate in applied and professional ethics. Upon graduation, students will be uniquely equipped to play key roles in newsroom and classroom decision-making. Annual scholarship covers tuition and fees for the three-year program and provides a \$15,000 stipend. Prerequisites: Bachelor's degree (or equivalent) and at least three years of full-time mass communication experience. Application deadline: March 2, 1999. Contact Kathleen Evans-Romaine, Institute for Applied and Professional Ethics, 207 RTEC, Ohio University, Athens, OH 45701, phone: 740-593-9802 or email: kape@www.ohio.edu.

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Westmoreland on our allies in a cable to the Pentagon:

Desertion rates are inordinately high. Battles losses have been higher than expected . . . ARVN troops are beginning to show signs of reluctance to assume the offensive and in some cases their steadfastness under fire is coming into doubt.

Here is how Sydney Schanberg told it with comparable restraint when ARVN really started falling apart, almost a full year before the withdrawal on U. S. troops:

Thousands of panicking South Vietnamese soldiers — most of whom did not appear to have made much contact with the advancing North Vietnamese — fled in confusion from Quangtri Province today, streaming south down Route 1 like a rabble out of control.

Among the unsung heroes of these extraordinary dispatches are the bureau chiefs, desk editors, and news service chiefs who allowed their ace reporters the time to search out their own version of the truth. Many of the very best dispatches in these volumes required weeks out in country with no guarantees of a publishable report, let alone a memorable one. "There are no scoops in a rice paddy," as Halberstam wrote in his profile of Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann. Some of these articles could fit into the daily newspaper format only because of their exceptional merit, timeliness, and exclusivity — for instance, Sydney Schanberg's Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage on the fall of Cambodia. But the majority were too narrative, too discursive, too personal, too long, and so ended up either in magazine or book form.

Among the big newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are represented here to an almost embarrassing degree — embarrassing to other large newspapers, that is. The names of their correspondents constitute a veritable honor roll: Halberstam, whose *The Making of a Quagmire* in 1965 set the table for the best of the reporting that would follow; Ward Just, whose *To What End* (1968) would become something of a sacred text; Gloria Emerson, whose reports on the failed South Vietnamese incursion into Laos in 1971 were singular for their clarity and compassion; and, of course, Schanberg,

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## BOOKS

who authored five of the very best of these chapters. And the list goes on: Don Oberdorfer and Peter Baestrup, both of whom would go on to write books on Tet '68, and Fox Butterfield and Neil Sheehan, who would contribute to *The New York Times's* Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the Pentagon Papers in 1971. *The Wall Street Journal* more than held its own with its one-man team of Peter Kann, who managed to write not only with style but even humor.

The best single newsmagazine piece, according to the evidence presented here, was not by a newsweekly corre-

spondent, but by Senator John McCain III, whose harrowing account of his years as a POW ran in *U. S. News & World Report*.

**A**mong the general interest magazines, *The New Yorker* and *Esquire* took the honors, *Esquire* if for no other reason than Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, and *The New Yorker* for Daniel Lang's extraordinary "Casualties of War," which, along with Seymour Hersh's reporting on My Lai for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, more than adequately covered the atrocities

perpetrated by U. S. troops on Vietnamese civilians. (Jonathan Schell's extraordinary contribution excerpted here came not from *The New Yorker* but his book *The Military Half*.) Oddly, several of the very best of these articles ended up in magazines that are now only dimly remembered: the last of three remarkable dispatches from John Saar appeared in the weekly *Life* just eight months before it closed for business; the book's most chilling piece of combat reporting came from the old *The Saturday Evening Post*, an account of Specialist 4/C Jack P. Smith's near-death experience in the Ia Drang Valley, in which he was wounded three times and taken for dead by the North Vietnam Army. Smith survived and recovered, but 93 percent of his company had been lost, and several of his friends killed themselves rather than submit to capture. Smith later became a TV correspondent for *This Week with David Brinkley*, and now is a contributor to *ABC World News Tonight* and *Nightline*.

The two volumes conclude with the entirety of Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, which is worth the price of admission all by itself.

Herr's reporting originally ran sporadically in magazines and was not brought out in book form by Knopf until 1977, a period when few people wanted to think about Vietnam. So I suspect there will be many readers of this book who will be encountering Herr's phantasmagorical account for the first time. A pleasure awaits. The Library of America wisely chose to put Herr's *Dispatches* at the very end of the second volume, primarily because there was no place else to put this book within a book, and also because it afforded the editors the chance to end with Herr's concluding words: "Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there."

This reviewer, taking his cue from the books' editors, will also leave the final words to Herr, for who could sum the war up better?

Year after year, season after season, wet and dry, using up options faster than rounds on a machine-gun belt, we called it right and righteous, viable and even almost won, and it still only went on the way it went on. When all the projections of intent and strategy twist and turn back on you, tracking team blood, "sorry" just won't cover it. There's nothing so embarrassing as when things go wrong in a war. ■

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# book reports

## WHAT THE PEOPLE KNOW: FREEDOM AND THE PRESS

by Richard Reeves

*The Joanna Jackson Goldman Memorial Lectures on American Civilization and Government,*  
Harvard University Press  
149 pp. \$19.95

**R**ichard Reeves, a journalist of good sense and long experience, avoids both pretentiousness and what he calls "Old Fartism" while asking whether journalism as he has known it can survive. He is more concerned than alarmed, but warns that big money, the entertainment ethos, and hubris threaten to swamp the reportorial tradition — that is, the tradition of the outsiders who try to tell the truth about what the public needs to know. But he invokes history to show that journalism has encountered and persisted through bad times before. Alluding to the repeated mutations of media technology in this century, he concludes: "Machines come and go . . . Reporters endure."

## THE LITTLE BOOK OF CAMPAIGN ETIQUETTE: FOR EVERYONE WITH A STAKE IN POLITICIANS AND JOURNALISTS

by Stephen Hess  
introduction by Judith Martin  
Brookings Institution Press  
159 pp. \$14.95

**T**his was a serviceable enough idea: a how-to book on civility in political campaigns for journalists and other participants. Alas, like many other alphabetically arranged works, this one suffers from its format, and even as practiced a hand as Stephen Hess of The Brookings Institution cannot do much about it. Essays on promising topics — the Horse Race, Consultants, Lying — get only so far and no farther. See, for example, Anonymous Sources, which concludes that reporters should try to avoid using unnamed sources but if they do should try to be sure that the information is accurate. Didn't know that. Still, what's there should help reinforce any stray impulses toward better behavior.

## BURN RATE: HOW I SURVIVED THE GOLD RUSH YEARS ON THE INTERNET

by Michael Wolff  
Simon & Schuster  
268 pp. \$25

**T**his tale of sound and fury — the title, *Burn Rate*, signifies the pace at which a startup company consumes its capital — has gained notoriety because of its rough portraits of the entrepreneurs whom Michael Wolff encountered in his ultimately unsuccessful exertions to promote himself from a mere publisher of computer books to an Internet multimillionaire. The frankness is entertaining, but the details are hard to believe. Did Wolff, unless he was wearing a wire, really capture all that dialogue he puts into quotation marks? If there is any moral here, it is that in those first heady days of the Internet, puffery and self-promotion worked better than achievement. The publisher has placed an index on the Web at [www.burnrate.com](http://www.burnrate.com), and a continuing debate about the book can be found at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## THE GOOD CITIZEN: A HISTORY OF AMERICAN CIVIC LIFE

by Michael Schudson  
The Free Press  
390 pp. \$27.50

**M**ichael Schudson, whose previous writings (for example, *The Power of News*) have added fresh insights to American journalism history, here employs formidable scholarly resources on a vastly broader topic: the common American political experience from colonial times to the present. He still weaves in a good deal about the press, often to contradict commonly held propositions — for example, that the founders saw the First Amendment and the free press as key components of our political system. Not so, says Schudson; the First was added as a politically advisable afterthought by Framers who regarded the press mostly as an annoyance. Similarly, he contends later that the often derogated Kennedy-Nixon debates were "a fine moment for American public life," and no more show

biz than the Lincoln-Douglas debates. As for the present, he sees our present "fretful" political culture less as a sign of collapse than a portent of latent vitality.

## THE FATHER OF SPIN: EDWARD L. BERNAYS & THE BIRTH OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

by Larry Tye  
Crown Publishers  
306 pp. \$27.50

**A**ged 103 when he died in 1995, Edward L. Bernays was a figure from another age, the man who engaged less in what we now call spin than in the practices of mass persuasion suggested by the phrase he coined, "the engineering of consent." Larry Tye of *The Boston Globe* is the first biographer who has roamed the eight hundred boxes of papers that Bernays left to the Library of Congress, and he has the advantage of reappraising, and correcting, much that Bernays wrote in his voluminous, Bernays-centered memoirs. Tye has produced a readable appraisal — encumbered by a topical rather than chronological organization — of the public relations counselor (another term he coined), whose chief client often seemed to be himself.

Professionally, Bernays's chief technique was to set up front organizations to advance, while disguising, the interests of his clients. Most notoriously, he represented United Fruit in the 1950s; when a leftist government in Guatemala challenged his client, Bernays orchestrated the press hue-and-cry that led to a CIA-sponsored coup. Not least, he was close to the publisher of *The New York Times*, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, a relative of Bernays's wife, Doris Fleischman, and attempted to influence the assignment of reporters to Central America. In the end, Tye acknowledges that Bernays was by no means the first to practice public relations, but claims that he was "the first to demonstrate for future generations of p.r. people how powerful their profession could be in shaping America's economic, political, and cultural life." He fails to add, but implies: for better or worse.

James Boylan

# excerpts

## HOW THEY INVENTED PEOPLE

FROM **OUTSIDER INSIDER: AN UNLIKELY SUCCESS STORY**, BY ANDREW HEISKELL WITH RALPH GRAVES. MARIAN-DARIEN PRESS. 266 PP. \$22.95.

*Launching a magazine is always daunting, even for the world's biggest publisher. In a worldly and wise new memoir that reveals much about the inner politics of a large corporation, Andrew Heiskell, chairman of Time Inc. from 1960 to 1980, relates how he helped start People. Today it is the most commercially successful magazine in the history of publishing, with operating profits of some \$300 million a year. But then as now it was highly criticized, and the early going was not easy. Excerpts:*

**M**ost successful ideas in publishing are not leaps of genius. But someone does have to think of an idea and then be in a position to do something about it. For the latter, it helps to be the chairman.

After the death of *Life* in 1972, I kept reaching and scratching for a good, big idea that would restore the company's health. Over the years I had been aware that the "People" page of *Time* was the most popular department in the magazine, the one many readers turned to first. And I knew that the "People" columns and the gossip columns of the newspapers were also popular. It didn't take an enormous leap of genius to go from there to the thought that we should create an entire magazine about people.

The person to whom I told my new magazine idea was Otto Fuerbringer, the head of Magazine Development. I said to him, "Hey, Otto, why don't we do a magazine about people? We'll call it *People*."

"Here's how I see it," I said. "Instead of starting with last week's news, we start with last week's people and see if we can't tell the reader quite a lot about what's going on."

I wanted the magazine to be lighthearted and gossipy. It would be fast, breezy, irreverent, and never, never solemn. Lots of pictures, but they would not have to be the size of *Life*, because *Life*'s page size was one of the things that bankrupted it. *People* would be standard size. It would be all black-and-white because there are very few occasions when you need to photograph people in color.

Hedley Donovan, the Time Inc. editor in chief, was not enthusiastic. Hedley was always careful about anything new. Years earlier I had suggested to him that we do a column in *Life*

called "The Presidency," and that Hugh Sidey in our Washington bureau would be perfect to write it. Hedley rather liked the idea, but he wanted to make sure it would hold up on a weekly basis. He made Sidey write ten columns, week after week, none of them published, before he finally agreed it would work.

During the period when we were noodling *People*, I called Clare Luce [author, ambassador, and widow of Time Inc. founder Henry Luce] and told her about it. "It has to be very chatty, very gossipy," she said. "Then women will love it. Tell us whether Liz Taylor is gaining weight or losing weight this month, and how much. I'll love it — and so will my maid and my hairdresser."

A magazine needs a structure, a framework, something that makes readers say to themselves, "Oh yes, I'm comfortable with this. I know what this is." You can surprise the hell out of the reader with this story or that picture, but you have to keep inside the familiar framework.

When I first thought of this magazine, I said to myself it has to be called *People*, it can't be called anything else. That would almost certainly cause legal problems — somebody was sure to own that title — but I remember thinking that if we could not get that title, we should not publish the magazine. With any other name we would lose half the value of the idea.

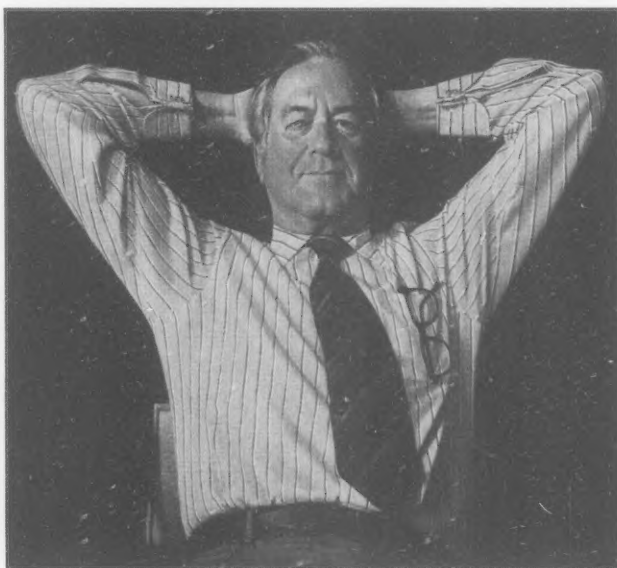
Sure enough, we learned there was a legal problem with the title. A local newspaper in the Midwest owned the name *People* and refused to sell out to us. We finally had to call

our magazine *People Weekly*. That distinction was enough to clear us legally, and the word *Weekly* has always been quite tiny on the cover. Try to find it.

*Heiskell goes on to relate how a skeleton staff published a dummy issue under editor Phil Kunhardt, a Life veteran:*

Returning to the office after several days off, Kunhardt was in for a shock. As he wrote in a memo, "I got in Monday morning only to hear that our office has had nothing but abuse for the past week — people inside Time Inc. either calling or appearing to say how dreadful the thing is. Hugh Sidey thinks it's a cross between *Women's Wear Daily* and *Silver Screen*. Tim Foote [former *Life* senior editor] says, 'It violates everything Luce stood for. It has no redeeming social or educational qualities whatsoever.'"

This kind of attack on a new magazine always happens at



PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON SHKLER

Time Inc. When *Life* was first published in 1936, it was decried by *Time* and *Fortune* people as cheap, trashy, and a disgrace to the company. When *Sports Illustrated* was first published in 1954, it was decried by *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life* people as a shallow, inconsequential, unworthy magazine and a disgrace to the company. It was known around the building as *Muscles or Jock or Sweat*. When *Money* was first published in 1972, *Time*, *Fortune*, *Life*, and *Sports Illustrated* people said it should be called *Greed* and decried it as a disgrace to the company. Now it was *People's* turn out to be the new kid on the block and therefore beneath contempt.

**W**e had to do a pro forma analysis of how much money we would have to invest in *People* before we could break even. How much were we going to gamble? These exercises are always optimistic. For instance, nobody ever estimated that *Sports Illustrated* would lose \$32 million (which is more like \$100 million today) over nine years. If we had had the benefit of that estimate, even Harry Luce would have decided against it. Nobody estimated how much *Money* would really lose before breakeven six or seven years after launch.

The pro forma on *People* came up with a possible loss of \$25 million before breakeven, which would take place after three years. (In the end, we invested only \$17 million and reached breakeven in eighteen months. By the time you read this page, *People* will have made a total profit of more than \$1 billion, a very splendid return on a \$17 million dollar investment.)

The early issues of *People* sold like crazy — 80 percent to

90 percent sales on newsstand, which is considered a technical sellout in this quirky business. But it was a resounding flop critically. Everybody said how awful it was. The criticism came not just from inside Time Inc. and from the press but from the ad agencies. Their position was, "Oh, we would never recommend that magazine to our clients." Advertisers are slow to come around until they can place a magazine in what they think is its proper niche. Since *People* was a brand new creature, it had no niche. The response in the academic community was especially frightful. The magazine was denounced in faculty lounges across the country — although a lot of professors seemed to have read a fair number of the stories.

Dick Stolley is the editor who really implemented and shaped the magazine. He deserves most of the credit for making it a non-schlocky magazine of reasonably high quality. I would have made it schlockier. He never ran a nude or near nude or a bare breast, which everybody would have assumed we would do. In fact, he ordered the elimination of nipples from show-through blouses with an airbrush.

After some years of experience in choosing *People* covers and paying close attention to the resulting newsstand sales, Stolley learned a lot about what works for *People* and what doesn't. He arrived at the following formula: "Young is better than old, pretty is better than ugly, television is better than music, music is better than movies, movies are better than sports — and anything is better than politics."

Stolley kept his edit staff thin, not just to save money but to make everybody feel needed and important. He was deter-



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## EXCERPTS

mined not to have a big staff because he thought totally dedicated people would do a better job. Nobody should have any spare time. This is known as the theory of being "optimally undermanned." The theory says that you want just enough people to get the job done without total exhaustion, but you want so few people that everyone thinks, "If I don't come to work today, the whole place will fall apart."

*People's* huge success and the severe criticism it continued to attract was terribly embarrassing for Hedley Donovan, the editor in chief. The product embarrassed him, even though it was a hell of a lot better magazine than everybody was saying. Hedley never really liked it and made that clear to me in private. But at least he never said so in public.

Intellectual criticism of *People* never bothered me. One day at lunch during the magazine's early weeks, Otto Fuerbringer was giving me a gloomy report about the attitude of his former colleagues at *Time*. I interrupted him. "Otto," I said, "if the editors of *Time* like it, then we have failed." ♦

## LONGING FOR NEWS

FROM **GLASS/PAPER/BEANS: REVELATIONS ON THE NATURE AND VALUE OF ORDINARY THINGS**, BY LEAH HAGER COHEN. DOUBLEDAY. 299 PP. \$22.95; PAPER \$12.95

The ritualistic customs of hospitality embedded in ancient cultures tell something of news's value, the peculiar nature of which is that it exists only in exchange, only in the sharing, gratifying both giver and receiver in its transmission.

In fairy tales, again and again, the travel-weary stranger must be welcomed in, must be given bread and wine and a place by the hearth. Slowly, the stranger's hair dries; the ratty cloak is shed; color is restored to cheek and brow. The stranger is a deity, or a prince, or a sage. Reward then flows from the stranger's pockets or lips; kindness is returned with gold, silks, magic, news. The stranger sits up all night by the flickering fire and in verse requites the hospitality bestowed. In myths, parables, fables, folklore, this story recurs with the quiet fervency of prayer.

The longing for news is the longing for true stories, for interlocking images that will connect up in huge, vivid portraiture, that will shed their cumulative light on our world so that we may more perfectly understand what it is to live in it. Or it is a longing for community, for solidarity, consensus on what we all agree to know, so that we may proceed with one another from a common conception, speak the same language, be less lonely. Or it is a longing for power—but this aspect of news can result only from its rationing, from the careful apportioning or guarding, the withholding or distorting of news; in this realm, news may be bought and sold and bargained with. But here it crosses the border into commodity; here it ceases to be news, exactly, and transforms itself into secrets. News itself has traditionally been free, not measurable according to units of price and property.

Cohen is the author of *Train Go Sorry: Inside a Deaf World*.



LEAH HAGER COHEN

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# Why I Skipped the Scandal

by Mike Hoyt

**H**i. My name is Mike and I'm a newsaholic. Addicted since '72, when I smoked some Watergate. But I was clean and sober for a while. Late summer, early fall. Why? The scandal. The news *was* the scandal. Couldn't take it anymore. A colleague here had an opposite reaction. When poor Jim Lehrer and his *NewsHour* turned away from Ms. Lewinsky for a note on the possible meltdown of global capitalism or a mention of some hapless Albanians, she would scream at the TV: *What about Monica?*

Not me. Oh, I kept up with the headlines, the gist of the Starr report, footnote #1 and all that. But when I closed my eyes I had a secret vision. I saw a rowboat. President Clinton was in it, rowing furiously to get away from Kenneth Starr, who was rowing just as furiously to catch him. They, in turn, were followed by a larger ship filled with journalists, all scolding, scolding. I saw Howell Raines knitting his eyebrows like Gregory Peck in *Moby Dick*. Maureen Dowd shivering with ecstasy at the feast of foolishness set before her. Michael Kelly and Chris Matthews were sharpening harpoons. Sam and Cokie were reporting off the port side and commenting to starboard. They glided away and became small dots on the horizon, then disappeared. I was glad.

I really ought to understand the necessity of aggressive coverage of a presidential crisis, but I was thinking like a civilian. Like some civilians, anyway. Like *Morning Edition* listener Sarah White, of Seattle, Washington. In September she told National Public Radio's listener line that "I am interested in just about any other news that you may have to share with me other than President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. They don't affect my life. They don't affect my day. And I'm really just not interested. Let's put some other stuff on the air, folks. Thanks." I'm afraid I was nodding in agreement.

It's worth thinking a moment about White's reaction, and my own, and all the others like us. While I was off the news juice, I was nonetheless listening hard to regular people about the press. Even from those who were fascinated by the scandal, I heard a lot of interesting anger about coverage. "I turn that shit right off," said my sister, the kindly nurse. "The press ground it into drivel," said my wife's cousin. "Exploited it beyond belief."

Many people simply want to close their eyes. The image of our president talking policy on the phone while directing a young woman toward his crotch is not one you want to hold. Nor is the unctuous face of a prosecutor who, by baring to the nation all of the woman's private acts and desires, used and degraded Monica Lewinsky at least as callously as did his target. Not that the thong-snapping intern gets many sympathy votes. Nor Congress, with its vicious games. The

whole affair felt dysfunctional and ugly, and we messengers got slimed by the messages that we carried.

But, jeez, were we eager to carry them. We were so quick to make the judgment that this affair was more important than anything else in the world. We were so pumped up with prosecutorial and competitive fevers that people noticed. And some were appalled. They saw us as part of the dysfunction.

High media types argue that this is largely a reaction to their trashy cousins. Evan Thomas, assistant managing editor at *Newsweek*, said this recently on *Charlie Rose*: "Anybody who watches five minutes of this nonstop twenty-four hour cable TV, with everybody hyperventilating . . . There's a bloodlust that's like watching a fox hunt . . . Journalism has and will suffer from it." But this doesn't quite wash. For one thing, mainstream journalists people those shows. As of October, *Newsweek* senior editor Howard Fineman had made thirty-eight appearances since the White-House-In-Crisis voyage got under way on Keith Olbermann's *Big Show* on MSNBC. Olbermann himself has publicly questioned the show's dubious hype. *Newsweek's* Michael Isikoff, the presidential-sex correspondent, had been on it seven times.

**S**omething about Monica has put high and low media in a blender. There have been weeks when the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* were hard to distinguish from *The National Enquirer*. Washington has lately had the look and sound of the chase scene in *Lord of the Flies*. Yet we're to believe that the scandal is not about sex, that if Starr had brought charges of perjury and obstruction related to, say, some old Arkansas real estate deal, it would have received the same amount of space and air.

The verdict of the public — that the Lewinsky affair was, by and large, overplayed — seems clear to me. It's not so much the words but the music. People are irritated by journalists who put on their frowny and concerned faces while obviously giddy with the heady joy of running full gallop with the pack.

There will be many press seminars about how we fared. I hope they focus on issues like tone and play instead of the relatively easy stuff, like accuracy and sourcing. Here was a test, admittedly a very difficult one: a big story about sex and betrayal, utterly unseemly, fed and whipped up by manipulators, as private as the workings of a marriage and as public as a globally televised lie. It required accurate and aggressive factual coverage, which, by and large, we supplied.

It also required humanity and restraint, which are hard to define journalistically. But people sense when they are absent. Here we mostly failed, I think, and we lost viewers and readers as a result. Journalists dream of big dramatic stories to cover and dark truths to expose. A presidential sex-and-lies scandal fits the bill. Be careful what you wish for. ♦

Mike Hoyt (mh151@columbia.edu) is CJR's senior editor.

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anchor and managing editor,  
*NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*

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editor, *Texas Monthly*

**Osborn Elliott**  
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School of Journalism

**Ellen Goodman**  
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**Clarence Page**  
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*Chicago Tribune*

**Howell Raines**  
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senior correspondent and co-editor, "60  
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Entry forms can be obtained from Charles Eisendrath, Director, The Livingston Awards, Wallace House, University of Michigan, 620 Oxford Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Phone: 734-998-7575. Fax: 734-998-7979. [www.umich.edu/~mjfellow/](http://www.umich.edu/~mjfellow/) E-mail: [drath@umich.edu](mailto:drath@umich.edu)

# The Lower case

## Starr calls Clinton friend

*The Gazette* (Montreal, Que. 08/11/98)

## CBS News Narrows Its Choices for Washington Bureau Chief



*The Washington Post* 08/25/98

## Flay Day service set

*The Review* (East Liverpool, Ohio) 06/11/98

## Jail regulators' hands tied in efforts to prevent abuse

*Austin American-Statesman* (Tex.) 09/14/98

## Study: Affirmative action benefits broad

*Ypsilanti Press* (Mich.) 09/09/98

## School testing mushrooms

*Marshfield News-Herald* (Wis.) 08/25/98

## Tourists asked to leave keys as Florida prepares for storm

*Grand Rapids Press* (Mich.) (09/22/98)

## U.S., Brits agree to bomb trial at Hague

*Jefferson City Post-Tribune* (Mo.) 08/24/98

## Freeh tours ruined embassy in Tanzania

*The Washington Times* 08/20/98

## English High delays threatening classes

*Daily Evening Item* (Lynn, Mass.) 08/12/98

## Authorities investigate switched baby case



*The Elkhart Truth* (Ind.) 08/18/98

There are no amethysts in a fox-hole, they say, and let me add, there are few pacifists in a cubicle. I've

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* 12/10/97

## FBI adds to reward for killing suspects

*The Olympian* (Olympia, Wash.) 07/15/98

## Socks Lower in Tokyo

*The New York Times* 08/17/98

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